United Nations

A/S-19/PV.8

General Assembly

Nineteenth Special Session

Official Records

8th plenary meeting
Thursday, 26 June 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Çelem (Turkey), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jiří Skalický, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Jiří Skalický, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Skalický (Czech Republic): I am particularly honoured to address the Assembly today in my capacity as Head of the Czech delegation to the nineteenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

My country associated itself with the statement made by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union last Monday.

We still expect this session of the General Assembly to bring about a number of concrete commitments, especially in the field of climate change. The Czech Republic subscribes to the three initiatives presented by the European Union: those on eco-efficiency, global water and sustainable energy for the future.

Moreover, given our painful experience with very serious forest degradation, we are devoting tremendous efforts to the recovery of our forests. This is why the Czech Republic supports the setting up of an intergovernmental negotiating committee in order to elaborate a strong global convention on forests.

To some extent, we might even be able to contribute to the most crucial discussion on the financing of sustainable development. The Czech Republic, being a new member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and a country associated with the European Union, would like gradually to change its status from that of a recipient country to that of a donor country, as well as to launch its own programme of technical assistance. We are ready and able to assist developing countries on many environmental issues, from water-supply schemes and freshwater protection to sustainable forestry and combating desertification.

Ever since the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development was established in 1992, the Czech Republic has participated in its work. We consider the Commission to be the most important global forum for sustainable development. The Czech Republic co-chaired the Commission from 1993 to 1994, and we are renewing our membership starting from 1998.

As to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Czech Republic — as a member of its Governing Council — is fully in favour of strengthening its role in dealing with global environmental issues, in

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

accordance with its mandate. We hope that the current debate on UNEP's governing structure and programme priorities will result soon in a revival of confidence and the enhanced authority of the organization. We praise UNEP for initiating and coordinating the preparations for major environmental conventions, and we hope that it will continue this activity in the future. My country is an active party to a majority of those conventions, with the exception of the Convention to Combat Desertification. I strongly believe that exception will change in the very close future.

Let me now emphasize some priority areas and points of special importance for our delegation. Implementation is the key word today, and we will have to move from pure rhetoric to concrete action. For implementation we will need well-adapted tools and appropriate measures and criteria for taking stock of the progress made so far.

This is why we would like to play an active role in developing and testing an appropriate set of indicators which would enable us to measure more precisely and in a comparative way the changes and progress made in selected environmental issues in the field of sustainable development. Later this year, the Czech Republic will host two workshops on indicators, in collaboration with Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and UNEP.

Two types of instruments for the implementation of sustainability principles are probably the most important: economic instruments and instruments for raising public awareness. We are active in both areas, and besides theoretical progress we can also offer some practical results which might be useful for other countries and regions.

We appreciate the fact that the wording of the final document in the field of chemical safety is much stronger than it was before. The Czech delegation considers the problem of the increasing number of chemicals entering the environment as a serious hazard to health and ecosystems. We would also like to express our concern over the emerging problem of endocrine disrupters and the permanent flow of obsolete chemicals to developing countries, which pose a threat to our sustainable future.

If our next meeting takes place in five years' time, it will be in the next millennium. Only in the second half of the twentieth century have people gradually realized that unbalanced, ruthless economic development and technical progress that ignores the threats to our environment and the vital function of the globe are a self-defeating philosophy. Expensive and painful retrospective measures seem to avoid the worst, but evidently that is not sufficient. Let us hope that this special session of the United Nations General Assembly will invigorate the world on its path towards truly sustainable development.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic for his statement.

Mr. Jiří Skalický, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Oscar Ceville, Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama.

Mr. Oscar Ceville, Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ceville (Panama) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The delegation of Panama enthusiastically joins in the warm and well-deserved congratulations previous speakers have conveyed to the President from this rostrum.

We see efforts to move sustainable development from "agenda" to "action" as a priority, and Panama has taken significant steps in that direction.

In terms of legislation, major legal instruments have been adopted to provide the country with an appropriate legal framework so that it can forge ahead in its economic and social development, as well as in the environmental aspects of sustainable development. At present, we are drafting a general law on the environment.

At the institutional level, we have set up a National Council for Sustainable Development, which is attached to the Office of the Presidency of the Republic and promotes and coordinates gradual change in the quality of life of the citizens of Panama.

Panama has introduced its first equality plan, known as the Plan of Action: Women and Development, which is designed to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. To this end, we have established national agencies, such as the National Directorate for Women and the National Council for Women.

With regard to the role to be played by municipalities in this strategy, the national Government, under the leadership of the President of the Republic, Ernesto Pérez Balladares, is developing the programme called Municipalities for the Twenty-first Century. It combines community participation and self-management in social development projects for the poorest municipalities in the country.

My Government's efforts have also focused priority attention on health care. Its modern and practical approach has led to verifiable successes in rates of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality and the life expectancy of Panamanians.

My delegation places special emphasis on the eradication of poverty. In our view, the poor of the earth will determine the fate of the world. Many countries are worse off now than they were in 1980. Millions of human beings are buffeted daily by misfortunes deriving from hunger, malnutrition and disease, which are compounded by ignorance and despair.

Poverty is generating unsustainable disparities around the world as the result of an unequal distribution of wealth. Sustainability requires that the benefits of development reach all peoples of the world and all sectors of the population in each country.

In the field of biodiversity, national efforts have been stepped up for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. This has been done through support for the modernization of the national system of protected areas, which make up approximately 25 per cent of my country's territory.

Furthermore, the national Government has created the indigenous districts of Kuna Yala, Emberaa Wuonaan, Madugandí and Ngobe Bugle, thus guaranteeing the rights of peoples to their lands and respect for their ancestral cultures and values. The total area of lands under collective indigenous regimes and protected areas accounts for 40 per cent of national territory.

The issue of fresh water is on our agenda and is linked with my country's future responsibility for administering, operating and protecting the Panama Canal, whose freshwater supply comes from its hydrographic basin, which also provides drinking water for more than 50 per cent of the country's population.

Panama wishes to point out to this forum, as we have in others, that we have taken the institutional and legal measures to meet this responsibility. Moreover, we take this opportunity to reiterate to the international community the invitation extended by our national Government to take part in the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal, which will be held from 7 to 10 September 1997.

For a maritime country like Panama, the sea's resources are an important part of our development potential. Accordingly, we are promoting a programme to assess populations of commercial marine species in order to ensure their sustainable use and take appropriate measures to regulate it.

My delegation hopes that special attention will be given to measures aimed at reducing gas emissions that damage the atmosphere. This is one of the central topics on which little progress has been made in global terms. We hope that the third session of the Conference in Kyoto can provide the springboard for realistic, accessible and equitable goals making it possible to reduce gas emissions.

In the last five years, Panama has endorsed regional initiatives, and we are working in the framework of those initiatives in a spirit of brotherhood to go beyond the phase of proposals and arrive at the stage of action and results. The Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America is one such example.

Our experience with the Central American Convention on Forests shows the importance and efficiency of ranking priorities and actions in this sphere at the global level. We therefore support the continued work of the Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Panel on Forests, which is also looking into the possibility of negotiating an international legally binding instrument.

Panama is joining the World Trade Organization fully convinced that free and organized trade should be conducted in a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, should be environmentally sound and should be a truly integral part of sustainable development, without barriers, discrimination or favouritism.

With regard to the future of the Global Environment Facility, my delegation is of the view that it needs adequate, sustainable and predictable resources. We also believe that the task of sustainable development needs the support of a global authority and that we should avoid legislative and institutional fragmentation. The regional presence of this body needs to be strengthened so that regional priorities can be addressed.

With a dynamic vision of the concept of sustainable development contained in Agenda 21, Panama's activities are being carried out within a global and local framework in order to leave to our children and teenagers, as their legacy for the next millennium, a healthy environment in which they can develop to their full potential and can contribute efficiently to the development of humankind when their time comes.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama for his statement.

Mr. Oscar Ceville, Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq.

Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Aziz (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like to convey warm greetings and to express our hope that this special session will succeed in achieving its objectives in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and in harmony with the fundamental principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration, which affirmed the strong link between the environment and development.

This special session comes five years after the Rio Earth Summit. It is regrettable that, since then, no substantial steps have been taken to reach the goals set by the Summit, especially those of the developing countries. On the contrary, the world today is witnessing attempts to marginalize and isolate the developing countries by various means, such as depriving them of their resources, obstructing their scientific and technological development and withholding environmentally clean technology. Certain developed countries are still reluctant to fulfil their obligations and commitments to stimulate sustainable development in developing countries and are resorting increasingly to coercive economic measures as a means for political and economic intimidation.

Iraq is in the forefront of countries with a deep-rooted legacy of stressing the cultural linkage between development and the environment. The legal provisions regulating aspects related to the environment in the first-known legal texts of the Babylonian codes are clear evidence of this. In more recent times, and consistent with its heritage, Iraq accomplished a great deal in the 1970s and 1980s in raising the standard of living of its citizens, establishing the infrastructure for public services and industries, improving health conditions and raising the quality of education. As confirmed by reports of various international agencies, environmental conditions in Iraq were progressively improving.

However, these conditions in our country began to deteriorate with the onset of the military aggression in 1991 and the continuation of the iniquitous embargo imposed upon us for seven years now.

The military operations led by the United States of America against Iraq in 1991 aimed primarily at — in addition to many civilian targets — the destruction of the infrastructure directly linked to the living and health conditions of the population, as well as the environment. This was done through the bombing of power plants and other public utilities. The bombardments also led to a halt in services related to the provision of drinking water, sewerage, heavy-water treatment plants, irrigation and drainage pumping stations. This in turn deprived our citizens of the energy they needed, thereby forcing them to cut down trees to use as a source of energy. Moreover, the bombardment of oil wells, other oil facilities and a large number of factories led to the release of large quantities of gases, fumes and chemical substances and other contaminating materials into the environment.

The report of Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, who was sent by the Secretary-General to Iraq in March 1991 after the cessation of military operations, gave an account of the enormous damage inflicted upon the civilian sector of Iraq and the tragic consequences thereof.

Iraq has made great efforts to reconstruct what was destroyed. For example, we were able to rehabilitate our water purification plants to 50 to 60 per cent of their pre-war capacity. We were also able partially to reconstruct destroyed power plants and most of the destroyed civilian infrastructure.

However, the continuation of the cruel and comprehensive embargo is obstructing the full rehabilitation, functioning and maintenance of basic services at their normal capacity. This is due to a lack of spare parts, which has in turn led to a shortage and deterioration of the quality of drinking water. The rate of contamination of drinking water in some governorates has reached 50 per cent.

Scientific studies have confirmed with decisive evidence that the United States used depleted uranium shells in the military operations against Iraq. This exposed vast areas of Iraq to lethal radioactive contamination. Mysterious medical cases have been recorded, such as congenital malformations, bone deformities, unexplained hair loss and strange skin diseases suffered by persons who were near the area where those shells fell during the bombardments. Moreover, cases of leukaemia among children are on the increase.

After the ceasefire, the American forces blew up depots containing chemical weapons in areas under their occupation in southern Iraq in an irresponsible way that did not conform to scientific considerations applicable to such situations. That in turn led to the chemical contamination of populated areas.

The deliberate acts of the United States, which aimed at inflicting destruction on Iraq in 1991, and its insistence on maintaining the iniquitous embargo have seriously set back environmental conditions in Iraq and have led to a grave erosion of living standards and health and education conditions and a huge decline in public services. For example, in the field of health, infant mortality rates between 1990 and 1995 increased from 25 to 95 per 1,000 live births. During the same period, the mortality rate of children under five increased from 45 to 127 per 1,000. My delegation has distributed a detailed report on the consequences of these conditions, which we hope will be studied carefully.

The oil-for-food agreement has not yet led to a tangible improvement of the situation. The agreement has not been implemented, in fact, due to the suspension of a large number of contracts for food, medicine and civilian needs by the American delegation in the Sanctions Committee. Moreover, it is a confirmed fact that, even if that agreement were to be implemented in full, it would not lead to a serious improvement of the living and health conditions of the population because of the insufficiency of the funds generated by it and the high rate of deductions therefrom. As for the funds allocated for purposes related directly or indirectly to the environment, such as the sectors of water, sewage and electricity, they are no more than 5 per cent of the total amount generated under the scheme. Most of the contracts relating to this area are currently on hold.

Despite these harsh conditions, which have been imposed upon Iraq for seven years now, efforts to improve the environment and to pursue development have not ceased. Last year, we promulgated new legislation to protect and improve the environment and to regulate the strong relationship between the environment and development.

We call upon the international community fully to shoulder its responsibility to eliminate all the obstacles facing Iraq in its programmes and efforts in the field of the environment and development. This falls within our common endeavour to create a better environment for future generations, in accordance with Agenda 21, its principles and the Rio Declaration. The lifting of the iniquitous embargo is the first step on the correct path, especially since Iraq has implemented its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions. This path would enable Iraq to use its resources to secure the requirements of protecting the environment, realizing development, ensuring adequate standards of living for its people and removing the injustice inflicted upon it.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq for his statement.

Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Ljerka Mintas Hodak, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia.

Ms. Ljerka Mintas Hodak, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Mintas Hodak (Croatia): Five years ago in Rio de Janeiro, Croatia participated in a United Nations conference for the first time. That conference came at a time when my country was facing an imposed war that caused immense suffering and economic and social disruption. The war was also the main cause of environmental damage in Croatia. Nevertheless, at that time we abided by our principles and beliefs — as we do today — in joining in the efforts of the world community in its goal of moving forward towards the permanent sustainability of our environment for the generations to come.

While the Rio Conference was the catalyst for a global environmental partnership for the coming century, negative trends in global pollution have continued to multiply. Humankind is rapidly reaching the threshold of sustainability, and we must adjust urgently.

Croatia's outlook in relation to the advancement of sustainable development is the result of various factors, including its geographic location in Central and Mediterranean Europe, its transition economy and its recovery from a war of aggression that has made reconstruction and social renewal necessary. All of these key issues for Croatia are linked to the three cornerstones of sustainable development.

Immediately following Rio, the Croatian Parliament issued a declaration on the protection of the environment. The commitments in our declaration, like those in the Rio documents, need to be continually renewed if they are to be more than mere gestures of good faith.

The diverse aspects of Croatia's environment and the specific mix of its geography — from Danubian to karst, from alpine to Mediterranean — simultaneously make for wonderful diversity and significant challenges. Many of the pressures and dangers facing our environment we cannot address alone. We share a joint responsibility with our neighbours to ensure that our common environmental heritage is unharmed. We share the Adriatic Sea with other States that have had a significant impact upon its quality. Our forests, soil and littoral karst environments are under threat, with 85 per cent of the pollution affecting them coming from sources abroad.

Croatia has been a constant participant in the development of the Mediterranean and Danubian regional programmes and remains open to greater regional and international cooperation. This approach is a practical response to the fundamental realization that environments do not stop at national borders but rather transcend them, making it the responsibility of all States to respond accordingly. In this context, Croatia welcomes the process of the increasing regionalization of United Nations activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, which will allow closer attention to be paid to the specific problems of individual regions.

Seeking greater institutional efficiency is important, and this process must keep pace with the efficiency that is sought to be achieved in the economic and environmental fields. Therefore, Croatia supports initiatives such as that of the Minsk Conference to request the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to prepare periodic reviews of the progress made by its member countries in achieving sustainable development. We also participate actively in the "environment for Europe" process.

Although its impact upon the problem has been small in global terms, Croatia has taken active steps to protect the ozone layer. Croatia has also taken responsibility in seeking the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, in accordance with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Furthermore, stringent domestic legislation prohibits the import of dangerous waste products into Croatia. We wish also to stress the role of sound energy policies in combating the threat of global warming and to reaffirm our commitment to the use of energy sources in ways that respect the atmosphere, human health and the environment as a whole.

Over the past seven years the Croatian Government has created a legal and institutional structure for the implementation of sustainable development. We are in the process of refining our legislation at the level of application and implementation.

A significant realization was arrived at in Rio — that in order to be truly successful, nine key groups within society must participate in sustainable development efforts. Croatia supports the transfer of part of the implementation responsibility to regions, municipalities and towns. I am pleased to state that the number of local initiatives and achievements in the field of environmental protection in Croatia is increasing. The activities of, and cooperation with, the 188 non-governmental organizations engaged in environmental protection in Croatia have been valuable.

In the economic sphere, the Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development was founded in 1996. It has attracted most of Croatia's largest enterprises, which have agreed to accept the Business Charter on Sustainable Development. Also founded were the Cleaner Technologies Centre and the Centre for Transfer of Technologies, which have attracted leading firms and organizations in the field. The Social Economic Council, a new tripartite body consisting of representatives of the Government, employers and unions, is in the process of being formed. That body will facilitate a balanced and consensual approach to issues related to the economy.

Five years after Rio, Croatia wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the principles accepted there and to show that it has taken domestic policy measures to implement those principles. At the same time, it is clear that this is still an evolving process.

Croatia supports more resolute action in keeping with the principle of "polluter pays" in the establishment of an efficient mechanism for addressing the problems of cross-border pollution and regulating compensation. Particular responsibility lies with developed countries, which cause approximately 80 per cent of the pollution on our planet.

Croatia also supports a practical approach in recognizing the differences and individual characteristics of States in the sphere of sustainable development and the adoption of appropriate measures to address them.

Croatia and other countries with economies in transition are aware that not all of the effects that an unrestrained free market can have are favourable. This is particularly true in the case of the environment. In this respect, those countries will have to create their own institutional balancing mechanisms. The experience and technology available in developed countries will be of importance in this task.

Finally, let me assure the Assembly that Croatia will remain true to its commitment to the common responsibility of all States in working towards a sustainable future for our planet.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia for her statement.

Ms. Ljerka Mintas Hodak, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, EGH, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya.

The Honourable Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, EGH, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Musyoka (Kenya): Allow me to begin by congratulating Ambassador Razali on his election as President of this special session.

Since the Rio Earth Summit, the world has witnessed tremendous changes that have adversely affected the implementation of Agenda 21. The environment has become increasingly vulnerable to degradation as a result of unprecedented conflicts, poverty, disease and disasters, among other factors.

The Rio summit set out a plan of action that was expected to place environment at the forefront. Five years later, Agenda 21 has met with constraints that have impeded its effective implementation in developing countries, particularly in Africa. Poverty remains a major constraint on the socio-economic development of our countries, threatening their political stability and in turn causing the degradation of the environment.

Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are a major drawback to the realization of good environmental management practices. We know that the highest per capita resource use and waste generation occur in developed countries; similar patterns are now emerging in developing countries. As we approach the twenty-first century, it is imperative that we change our production and consumption patterns.

The situation is worsened by the transfer of unsound and unfriendly environmental technologies. The international community, particularly the industrialized countries, have an obligation to provide the developing countries with access to sound technologies and the corresponding know-how on favourable terms.

My delegation associates itself with the views expressed by the Chairman of the Group of 77, speaking on behalf of that Group and China. Kenya believes that the future of our planet is in our hands, and hopes that the outcome of this session will be accorded the seriousness it deserves. We note that decisions of past international conferences have not been fully honoured. For instance, the implementation of the United Nations target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance has been declining; the figure now stands at about 0.25 per cent. This has exacerbated the deterioration of the global environment. My delegation hopes that, this time around, the international community will honour the commitments, agreements and targets agreed upon in Rio.

In Africa, desertification and drought continue to threaten the livelihood of the people, the animals and the environment. We are witnessing tremendous losses in biological diversity and dramatic changes in climatic conditions. In this regard, Kenya has signed and ratified the three sustainable-development conventions: on biological diversity, on climate change and on desertification. The need for the international community to implement the commitments in those conventions cannot be overemphasized. We are convinced that all pending matters in the conventions and processes should be concluded before we consider negotiating any other conventions.

The importance given to environmental issues was demonstrated in 1972, when the international community, through the United Nations, held the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which saw the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Kenya is proud to have been associated with that Conference and feels honoured to have been selected by the international community to host the headquarters of UNEP in Nairobi. The factors and objectives that made Nairobi the location for the UNEP secretariat to serve the world's environmental needs are still valid today.

We note that UNEP needs to be revitalized and strengthened by streamlining its administrative and financial management. In addition, UNEP requires adequate and predictable financial resources in order to fulfil its mandate. We therefore welcome UNEP Governing Council decision 19/1 B, on UNEP governance, and the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, which reaffirmed the role and mandate of UNEP as the principal United Nations body in the field of environment.

As host country to both UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, we are concerned that the two United Nations programmes in Nairobi continue to suffer from inadequate funding and capacity underutilization despite their enormous potential. It is imperative that General Assembly resolutions that require meetings to be held at the headquarters of a given body are adhered to.

Kenya is concerned about a proposal to establish a new world environmental organization. We view this move as not being in line with the spirit demonstrated in Stockholm. UNEP remains underutilized and strapped for cash. It is therefore difficult to comprehend how this proposal would fit within the ongoing restructuring of the United Nations aimed at avoiding duplication.

Under the able leadership of His Excellency President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, Kenyans are becoming increasingly aware of the need to manage their natural resources in a sustainable manner, as the environment is our greatest asset. Our environmental policies are therefore being developed in line with the Kenya National Environment Action Plan, which contains a broad strategic framework for environmental conservation and management. We are convinced that public awareness and environmental education will enhance public participation in environmental management. It is against this background that Kenya is taking the major step of introducing environmental education as an integral part of the school curriculum.

The Government hence intends to create a Great Rift Valley conservancy, where the skills of the people and land-use practices will be harmonized. Along with that, the Government is working out modalities that will address the decline of the marine biological diversity along the coastline and in the fresh water lakes. We wish to appeal to the international community to make available the resources necessary to augment our national efforts to realize the objectives of sustainable development as called for in Agenda 21.

Finally, as we approach the next millennium, let us reflect on the commitments we made five years ago at Rio and on our expectations of these. We need to reexamine our approaches to the utilization of the finite resources of planet Earth. This is a responsibility that lies with all of us, and together we must resolve to leave behind a safe and sound legacy for future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya for his statement.

The Honourable Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, EGH, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Arian Starova, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania.

Mr. Arian Starova, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Starova (Albania): The convening of this special session five years after the Rio summit indicates the importance that Member States attach to the protection of the environment, an enormous challenge facing us and the generations to come. We are convinced that, in addition to reviewing the implementation of the commitments set out in Agenda 21, this session will help enhance environmental action on the part of States, the United Nations and its entire system, and regional organizations.

The Summit for Social Development, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and the regional conferences have strengthened the international coordination of efforts for the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration.

Since the Rio Conference, Governments have adopted national plans for the environment and have included environmental concerns in their development strategies. The World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies have reviewed their programmes and projects, making them more environmentally oriented.

Problems which require urgent action remain. We have much to worry about: increasing shortages of clean water, climate change and deforestation. In our opinion, this session has reconfirmed the existence of political will on the part of States to deal seriously with these problems. It is now up to us to act accordingly by adopting the needed legal instruments.

We support the further strengthening of the role of the United Nations system for more effective international action by assisting States' efforts to cope with environmental issues and put development on a healthier environmental basis. We also deem the regional approach of United Nations actions to be the proper way of addressing environmental concerns. In this context, it is necessary that the programmes in the framework of the United Nations system take into consideration the specific needs of countries with economies in transition.

In these last years, there have been significant developments in the institutional and legal frameworks of environmental activities in Albania through the adoption and implementation of a national strategy for the environment in the fields of education and public participation in international cooperation. The principle of sustainable development has increasingly become the guideline of our policies, which seek economic, social and environmentally sound solutions.

In 1992, the Government reorganized the National Committee for the Protection of the Environment and increased its personnel, while establishing for the first time twelve regional environmental agencies. Separate sections were organized within several ministries and local government in order to reconcile economic policies with environmental considerations. For the first time, in 1995, an environmental engineering section was opened at the University of Tirana where specialists in this field are trained.

The legal framework already includes a number of laws and other legal acts for the protection of the environment. I can mention as particularly important the law on the protection of the environment, laws concerning biodiversity, forests and forestry police, the protection of wild fauna, hunting, fishing, water, and the decision of the Government on hazardous waste. Albania is now party to several conventions on the environment, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Our focus for the future will follow two main lines: first, the enforcement of the existing laws and those Conventions, and secondly, the broadening of the legal framework and adherence to other relevant international instruments. In January 1994, the Council of Ministers adopted a first national plan of action on the environment, based on our national strategy for the protection of the environment and with the support of the World Bank. The plan, the implementation of which started in 1994, offers concrete action and immediate solutions as well as medium- and long-term guidance for environmental issues, while defining concrete tasks for environmentally-oriented institutions and organisms all over the country. More than 40 environmentally-oriented non-governmental organizations are active in Albania today, despite our complete lack of a tradition in the field. The activities of those organizations have helped to increase public awareness on issues concerning the environment. It is positive to note that their cooperation with the relevant State institutions remains at a satisfactory level.

In all their efforts to protect the environment, the Albanian institutions have had the full support of the United Nations system and various European structures. In this context, I would like to note with gratitude the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Their assistance has been both technical and financial, and we hope that these organizations and institutions will maintain their contributions in the future.

Despite renewed efforts, serious problems remain, such as the deforestation of tens of thousands of hectares of forest area as a result of illegal logging, land erosion, and urban pollution due to improperly controlled activities on the part of private enterprises and the old structure of energy sources. The problem of rehabilitating the running water system remains urgent. The rapid development of the construction industry has not been guided by environmental considerations.

To these problems were added the negative effects on the environment that resulted from the events of these last months in Albania. The current security situation in the country has created ample room for criminal actions on the part of irresponsible elements, resulting in damage to forests and other natural resources. We hope that these problems will receive due attention as soon as Albania returns to normalcy. On 29 June, Albanians will vote to elect a new Government. These elections will be crucial for the future of the country; hence the Government of National Reconciliation has done all in its power to organize the elections, while enjoying to this end the strong support of the international community, the United Nations and European structures such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

I would like to reaffirm the appreciation of the Government of National Reconciliation and of the Albanian people for the prompt action on part of the United Nations in response to the situation in my country, including in particular the Security Council's authorization of a multinational protection force for Albania and the extension of its mandate via resolution 1114 (1997).

The Acting President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania for his statement.

Mr. Arian Starova, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Bin Said Al-Khayareen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar.

Mr. Ali Bin Said Al-Khayareen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Al-Khayareen (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Five years ago the Rio Conference faced many challenges. Believing that life on planet Earth had entered a critical stage, the Conference was able to meet those challenges after enormous efforts. Today, however, the challenges facing us are in fact more serious than ever before.

Indeed, what is needed now is action and implementation, not mere adoption of principles and recommendations. What is required of us now is to translate words and guidelines into concrete deeds that will transport this planet, with all its living beings and all its natural components, to a new phase, wherein development dominates and backwardness retreats. Needless to say, this will not happen unless and until all countries carry out the commitments of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21.

In this respect the State of Qatar has complied fully with the vision of Rio. In the years since then, it has acceded to the Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes, the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer, and the Montreal Protocol and its amendments, as well as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In addition, we were among the first signatories of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The State of Qatar, believing in the importance of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, has paid special attention to strengthening and further developing its environmental organs and bodies and enlarging their mandates in order to enable them to perform the roles they were entrusted with more efficiently. It has also modernized its environmental legislation, taking into account the provisions of international and regional environmental conventions, protocols and agreements.

It should be noted in this respect that Qatar has introduced environmental safety among the most important criteria for starting any industrial project in the country. At the same time, it has developed a strategy for dealing with hazardous industrial wastes.

What we aspire to achieve should be sustainable development in a balanced manner; one that takes into consideration, as a whole, all the environmental, economic and social dimensions of this process, and recognizes the difference in levels of development between developed and developing countries and their widely varying capabilities. This should be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, with emphasis placed on the right of States to growth and progress without negative impacts on their development programmes or their social or economic stability.

In this context, we stress the importance of taking into account the special situation of developing countries which may be affected by conditions arising from the adverse effects of climate change. Consideration should also be given to those affected by the implementation of measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, as is the case with the developing countries that are highly dependent on income generated from the production, processing and export of oil. This was recognized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We would also like to underline the importance of dealing in a comprehensive manner with all greenhouse gases without limiting measures to carbon dioxide, taking into account the sinks and reservoirs of such gases. At the same time, care should be taken that none of the measures and policies related to reducing the emissions of such gases become a disguised barrier to international trade, since this would affect the open trade system which we regard as an effective means of achieving sustainable economic development.

In addition to the above, there are numerous other tributaries that flow into the process of achieving sustainable development, all of which require immediate action without undue delay. Such action includes the developed countries shouldering their historic responsibilities towards the environment and development by honouring their financial commitments, because reducing poverty in the world is in the interest of all, the rich as well as the poor.

Such action also includes the creation of a unified legal mechanism for the protection of the environment; the integration of the provisions of international conventions into national legislation; and compatibility between financial resources and the action required for the protection of the environment. Other elements include the spreading of environmental awareness, calling attention to the wasteful use of natural resources and strengthening environmental education by making it part of national educational curricula, and the promotion of wider participation by the private sector in the various fields of development.

Barely three years from now, the countries of this planet will be entering a new century. It will not be an exaggeration to state that all countries of the world are in the same boat. If it floats, all will survive. Should it sink, all will perish, be they developed or developing countries, rich or poor nations.

Therefore, while the State of Qatar looks forward to a better and brighter future, it appeals to all States of the world to strive earnestly and seriously towards that brighter future for us and for the coming generations. At the same time, it associates itself with all the honest efforts expressed by the Heads of States, Governments and delegations in their addresses before this special session.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar for his statement.

Mr. Ali Bin Said Al-Khayareen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The political scientist MacKender once said that the world is like a copper ball: if it is struck anywhere on its surface, the repercussions will echo throughout the ball. In such a framework this special session of the General Assembly has convened to place us all before our responsibilities to preserve life and the future of generations to come.

Proceeding from this, let me remind the Assembly that our children in the occupied Arab territories — which include Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Syrian Golan, south Lebanon and the western Bekaa — are subjected to harsh Israeli practices that jeopardize the life, dignity, development and environment of man. The time has come for the voices of those children and their suffering to toll loudly so that they may be heard by the United Nations and in every part of this world so that we may all know what grave harm and dangers Arabs face under Israeli occupation.

The environment and land are indivisible. If one State were to appropriate the lands of others by force, what role would the environment then have? If one's land is expropriated, what meaning does environment have for him? This applies to Israel, which practices aggression, confiscates Palestinian lands and appropriates them, continues to build settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Syrian Golan, destroys the homes of Palestinians and uproots them from their lands, burns forests, cuts irrigation waters, appropriates water resources, uproots trees and uses poison gases.

Israel continues to change the environmental, geographic, historic and demographic characteristics of the occupied Arab lands. It imposes an economic siege on the people of those lands. We are facing grave difficulties which stand as obstacles to our efforts to protect the environment and avoid the damage resulting from its destruction. These are first and foremost due to the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab lands and increasing Israeli military capabilities. Among those is the fact that Israel has plants for the production of weapons of mass destruction, with nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons at the forefront. This is in addition to the production of many other conventional weapons, all of which are used against us. They are always a threat for expansion, occupation and further settlement.

Israel continues to refuse to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It persists in conducting a military nuclear programme outside the international regime to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, with the concomitant grave threat to the security, safety and environment of the peoples of the region now and in the future.

Furthermore, Israel has buried 52 tons of industrial nuclear and chemical waste in the occupied Arab territories. This bears the seeds of an environmental catastrophe throughout the entire Middle East. Therefore, and given people's right to live in dignity in a healthy, unpolluted environment, we call on the leaders present at this important international forum to bring pressure to bear on Israel to put an end to such actions and cease bringing harm to the lives and health of those living in the occupied territories.

On the basis of the guidelines of Agenda 21 and the mechanism for implementing them, the Syrian Arab Republic, due to the great importance attached by President Hafiz al-Assad to environmental and developmental issues, has acceded to the conventions stemming from the Earth Summit of 1992 and has implemented a number of the activities they provide for, despite the many difficulties facing us.

First, a comprehensive biodiversity survey has been undertaken in order to prepare a national strategy on biodiversity and programmes of action have been proposed for the preservation of biodiversity in Syria.

Second, in the field of climate change and the atmosphere, some industries have been converted to the use of materials that do not damage the ozone layer.

Third, the first stage of a comprehensive survey of the current environmental situation in the country has been completed, and priorities have been set for the preparation of a national strategy and an environmental programme of action. Symposiums to provide training in the field of the environment have been set up in order to ensure sustainability.

Fourth, the different State institutions have been working together to integrate environmental considerations into development plans, particularly the eighth five-year plan currently being prepared, and we have been assessing the environmental impact of all development activities in order to ensure that they are in line with Syria's environmental policies.

Fifth, a data bank is being set up by the Ministry of the Environment as a nucleus for an environmental data bank.

Sixth, we are carrying out a national study to identify arid areas and those threatened with desertification in Syria, and we have a new programme to study industrial pollution control.

Seventh, a new sanitation plant has been completed in Damascus, and we are looking at the possibility of building new sewage-processing plants in all governorates in Syria. There are plans to include water resource management in Syria in the activities of the Ministry of Irrigation. We are also working with the Ministry of Education to introduce environmental studies into curricula.

However, there are many difficulties facing us in implementing Agenda 21, the first of which is the lack of codification of environmental issues. Thus, we are preparing a national environmental law.

Secondly, the lack of testing equipment in the Ministry of the Environment prevents us from making precise studies. There is a lack of highly trained management staff and a shortage of technical means to face up to environmental challenges.

As we are preparing our priorities in Syria, we are seeking sources of financing for the different environmental projects. The Ministry of the Environment is cooperating with all national institutions in order to prepare a national water resource management plan given the importance of water resources and their environmental importance.

We are also cooperating with the Global Environment Facility in order to improve national capacity. Syria attaches great importance to forests and their development, in view of their importance for environmental balance and as national resources. They are the lungs of our cities, and we support the recommendation to the Commission on Sustainable Development to create an Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

Syria supports international efforts to eradicate poverty, which is a major factor in the deterioration of the environment and natural resources. There are many obstacles before national sustainable development can be achieved, and there are other difficulties at the international level.

First, there is grave concern because the objectives that we agreed upon in Rio five years ago have still not been implemented. We continue to divide the world into rich or poor countries, countries of the North or the South. There are many promises that have not been fulfilled.

Secondly, there are many other negative factors, such as the burden of debt, poverty, unemployment, economic imbalances, threats to biodiversity, soil erosion and deforestation.

Thirdly, there is a reluctance to transfer advanced technology to developing countries in order to improve their environmental conditions.

Fourthly, there is grave concern with regard to the destructive effects of the dangerous, toxic and radioactive wastes that some States attempt to dump or bury in developing countries, as if our peoples should be the victims of industrial development.

More than ever before, our planet now needs courageous political will to implement the promises and commitments enshrined in all international resolutions in the field of environment and sustainable development.

Financial means must be provided to developing countries, and technology must be transferred to them in preferential terms. We must also change the patterns of consumption and production. Once again, we stress the need for practical and legal mechanisms to combat the transport of toxic waste, nuclear or otherwise, to developing countries.

Let us protect human lives from disease and death. If the industrialized, developed world truly wants to participate in improving the environment, we have an opportunity to find the political will to achieve equality in green spaces, which should not be limited to developed countries. There is an urgent need for more courageous environmental initiatives within the United Nations, particularly in the area of forests.

If developing countries are to be full and effective partners in saving our planet we need, first and foremost, to improve our scientific means. Expertise and knowledge, along with advanced technology, must be transferred to developing countries.

This is one of the main points contained in Agenda 21. One cannot talk of sustainable development and the environment without looking into the problems of developing countries, including the problems they face because of the terms of international trade and the transfer of resources.

We attach great importance to changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Just and comprehensive peace, development and the protection of the environment are all complementary and indivisible. In this context, we believe that aggression and the occupation of the land of others by force will paralyse efforts to obtain sustainable development. General Assembly resolution 51/190 reasserted the principle of the permanent sovereignty of peoples under foreign occupation over their natural resources. It reasserted the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the people of the Syrian Arab Golan to benefit from their natural and other economic resources. The resolution stresses that any violation of this right is illegal and that armed aggression and foreign occupation destroy the environment and sustainable development, which is in accordance with principle 23 of the Rio Declaration.

Aggressor States must therefore respect international law and United Nations resolutions on environmental protection.

Let us embark on the path of renewed hope as we stand on the threshold of the twenty-first century. Let us create a new world of peace, security and stability in which the hopes and aspirations of all the children of the world will be fulfilled in a bright future.

I wish this historic meeting full success in its work.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement.

Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: May I remind representatives that statements are limited to seven minutes.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sadyk Safaev, Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Sadyk Safaev, Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Safaev (Uzbekistan): This special session of the General Assembly is undoubtedly a representative forum addressing, perhaps, the most important problems of the contemporary world and the future of the planet, problems that are a matter of concern for all mankind.

Half a decade has passed since the Rio de Janeiro Conference on environment and sustainable development and it has become more evident than ever before that the Conference was one of the most important and meaningful events of contemporary international affairs.

The Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan highly appreciates the importance of the Rio de Janeiro Conference and intends to participate most actively in international cooperation, as well as to ensure the unconditional implementation of its own national programme, elaborated in consideration of the main documents adopted within the framework and in the light of the Rio de Janeiro Conference. Uzbekistan participates actively in the implementation of the United Nations projects which are carried out in Central Asia in this sphere. The National Commission on Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan is functioning successfully. Special bodies on the implementation of the Conventions on biological diversity, desertification and the protection of the ozone layer have been established in Uzbekistan. However, for well-known reasons, most of the problems which are being discussed today are critical for Uzbekistan as well.

As is the case with all newly independent States, Uzbekistan faces the challenges of sustainable development, the structural reconstruction of the economy and the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs — in other words, economic progress. It is natural and justified that the developing countries strive to achieve higher standards of living, which require expanded economic production and the intensification of industry and agriculture. And now we must answer the question: How do we achieve harmony between the natural and justified aspirations of the countries and regions to ensuring rapid economic progress and the need to carefully preserve the environment, natural and climatic, and the ecological and energy balance?

Nowadays, one can say without exaggeration that in Central Asia there has come into being one of the most dangerous zones of ecological disaster. There is a constantly increasing threat of a shortage and qualitative degradation of land. Desertification caused by human activity is taking place and the salinization of the lands is increasing. At the same time, the shortage of water is becoming more and more critical. A great danger in the region is imposed by radioactive waste stockpiles, a considerable number of which are located along rivers that carry their waters to towns and villages.

The shrinking of the Aral Sea has turned out to be one of the most pressing ecological problems — one might say a national disaster. However, it is far from being the problem of Uzbekistan alone or solely that of the Central Asian countries. It qualifies as one of the most serious ecological catastrophes in the history of mankind on our planet. Today, some 35 million people are living under the direct impact of this catastrophe. In the course of the past 20 to 25 years — within the life of one generation — we have witnessed the death of the whole Sea, one of the biggest landlocked water reservoirs of the planet.

In 1962, the level of the Sea was 1.6 times greater than it is today, the water volume 2.7 times greater. The mineral content in the water has increased fourfold. As a result, it is no longer one sea, but rather two lakes. Its shores are 60 to 80 kilometres from the original coastline.

In the 1980s in the Aral Sea area and on all the surrounding territories, sand storms began to be observed. The dust trails are as long as 400 kilometres in length and 40 kilometres in width, with dust storms stretching as far as 300 kilometres away. Experts estimate that 15 to 75 million tons of dust rise into the atmosphere annually.

All this has brought about a serious change of climate in the Aral Sea area. The growing deficit of water and its deteriorating quality has resulted in the degradation of the lands and plants.

With the shrinking of the Aral Sea, there has appeared a whole complex of ecological, socio-economic and demographic problems which are international and global in scope because of their origin and serious consequences. Today, the Aral problem has turned out to be a planetary issue and has already managed to break the biological balance and have a negative impact on the genetic bases of the population on the vast territories.

Aware of the seriousness of the Aral Sea problem and of the need to take urgent measures to save it, the Governments of the Central Asian Republics and a number of international organizations set up an international fund to save the Aral Sea. They adopted a Declaration of the States of Central Asia on the problems of the sustainable development of the Aral Sea basin.

However, it is evident that without urgent measures on the part of the international community of nations and without the necessary aid from world organizations, it will be impossible to solve the problem relying solely on the opportunities available to the countries of the region. Alongside concrete assistance on the part of international organizations, an important contribution to the matter of saving the Aral Sea and the sustainable development of the region would be to elaborate a United Nations convention on the sustainable development of the Aral Sea basin and to declare 1998 as the year of environmental protection in Central Asia under the aegis of the United Nations.

Bearing in mind the political statement that is going to be adopted as a very important outcome of this session, we welcome the agreed understanding of the international community that, alongside socio-economic development and environmental protection, peace and security are the obligatory preconditions of sustainable development. Indeed, can we speak about comprehensive sustainable development with conflicts and wars still raging? In this regard, in our opinion, the initiative to declare Central Asia free of nuclear weapons is worth paying attention to. We are grateful for and highly appreciate the Member countries' support of this initiative.

To conclude, I would like to mention that the Republic of Uzbekistan attaches great importance to the work of this special session, as well as to the continuation of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Environment Programme. We hope that this session will make a concrete contribution to the matter of solving the difficult problems that we all face on the eve of the new millennium.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan for his statement.

Mr. Sadyk Safaev, Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on your election to your high post and to wish you every success. The delegation of Turkmenistan welcomes the open dialogue and businesslike atmosphere of this session and is prepared to contribute to its effective outcome.

It has been noted at this session that progress has been made in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the decisions of the Rio Conference held in 1992. At last mankind has become aware of its responsibility to future generations for the preservation of the environment as well as of the need to take urgent measures to confront the existing situation. The United Nations considers this problem to be one of its foremost priorities and has developed and undertaken specific measures to implement conventions adopted in this regard.

Following the Rio Conference, each subsequent forum has undoubtedly enriched and specifically prioritized individual areas of activity. However, the dimensions of this global problem are so enormous that they will require still greater efforts, not only on the part of the United Nations but also on the part of each country, as well as constructive international cooperation. We hope that the current special session will provide fresh impetus to international cooperation in protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development and that it will also contribute to the successful solution of this problem.

Awareness of the importance of environmental problems has enabled the President of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Mr. Niyazov, to take a number of important steps towards resolving these vitally important problems. Work has been initiated to update legal norms in the field of environmental protection, and a number of new laws and a health code have been adopted. The Lukman programme, aimed at the adoption of thoroughgoing preventive measures, has been worked out. Together with the United Nations Development Programme, we have completed the elaboration of our national environmental protection programme. Turkmenistan has acceded to and ratified the main package of international conventions and treaties dealing with environmental issues and is actively developing international cooperation.

A start has been made, but the country still faces numerous environmental problems. At present Turkmenistan is focusing attention on ensuring balanced development of the economy and public health. For example, work will continue to provide high-quality drinking water to the population of Turkmenistan in an area that is experiencing an environmental disaster — the Aral Sea basin — and to eliminate the negative impact of the Caspian Sea transgression to the west of the country. Measures have been taken to improve productivity and stability in agriculture and animal husbandry. Special efforts will focus on the rational use of natural resources, combating desertification, water and wind erosion, swamping and flooding. Plans are under way to develop a network of specially protected areas and the assisted conservation of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna. All this requires significant capital investment.

An Institute of Desert Research has been established in the country, given the fact that 80 percent of Turkmenistan's territory consists of deserts. Following the initiative of President Niyazov, the country has elaborated a national programme to combat desertification. The Institute is undertaking joint projects together with Israel's Ben Gurion Institute of Desert Research in Israel, and is also carrying out a project, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, to establish a scientific research centre and a project of the Commission on Sustainable Development aimed at saving the Aral Sea.

The President took the Chair.

A number of joint international projects are also being implemented. We are an active participant, at the regional level, in the work of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. At the Bangkok conference, Turkmenistan was elected coordinator of the programme to combat desertification, with the participation of various countries in the Asian region. In this connection, Turkmenistan will establish a network of scientific research and training centres in the Asian region and will set up special courses to provide training to desert researchers.

One of the most important chapters of Agenda 21 concerns programme implementation. We believe that the participation of developed donor countries plays an important role in this regard. It includes joint scientific and research activities relating not only to environmental protection but also to environmental improvement, the elaboration of special programmes, training and the transfer of environmentally safe technologies. Those activities are especially important for countries that have huge deposits of raw materials and are intensively developing their industry and transport, as well as for countries that are consumers of raw materials. Assistance by donor countries would contribute to the speedy implementation of such programmes and projects. We support initiatives by countries that offer new technologies, assistance in training personnel and the exchange of experiences.

In our view, the Conference on climate change to be held in Kyoto will give due consideration to those issues, and we hope that it will be successful. It is clearly necessary to elaborate a universal and uniform legislative instrument for environmental protection that will cover responsibility for environmental pollution. What we need are joint scientific studies that will form the basis for establishing programmes of international interest. For example, use of the Caspian Sea should be based primarily on a scientifically substantiated approach, because this Sea is a unique water basin rich in hydrocarbon resources. It abounds also in fish stocks that should be preserved and multiplied.

Experience has shown more than once that today's environmental problem may turn into tomorrow's environmental disaster. Countries affected by the Aral Sea crisis have repeatedly drawn the attention of the international community to their plight. The negative consequences of this catastrophe are still being felt. They include an adverse impact on people's health and the deterioration of the quality of the soil and the ambient atmosphere. We are grateful to the United Nations Children's Fund, which was the first to respond to this calamity and which developed the Aspera special project for regional and ecological assistance, aimed mainly at helping children and women in the affected areas of the Aral Sea region. A number of United Nations agencies and the World Bank are making efforts to find a solution, but this is not enough fully to resolve the problem. We need a coordinated programme for countering the effects of the Aral Sea crisis in order to improve the environment of the region.

The rapidly deteriorating ecological situation in the world makes it imperative for the planet's inhabitants to take more vigorous action to preserve the environment. The preservation of the planet for future generations is our common goal, and we can be successful in this endeavour only if we act together.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan for her statement.

Mrs. Ataeva, Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Juli Minoves-Triquell, Chairman of the delegation of Andorra.

Mr. Juli Minoves-Triquell, Chairman of the delegation of Andorra, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Minoves-Triquell (Andorra) (*spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation*): Principle 21 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development proclaims:

> "The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all" *(A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), p. 12)*.

Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 also defines as critical the participation of today's youth in decision-making processes concerning environment and development.

Why did the writers of Agenda 21 identify and highlight the role of youth? Five years after the Conference in Rio de Janeiro, it must be restated: because, by the laws of life, young people are the ones who have hopes for the future, who keep the pulse of humanity going — the vibration of that which grows and is alive.

Youth is, on the whole, an irrepressible force: if we are able to educate it to respect its natural surroundings and other human beings, it will create the basis for the prosperous and harmonious society of the third millennium; but its energy, when channelled into hatred, selfishness and prejudice, can lead us to annihilation.

I therefore advocate today, as my first point, the education of youth: education to know how to respect nature; education also to fight unemployment. Youth unemployment, specially in developing countries, destroys motivation and erodes hope, transforming beings full of promise into emblems of despair. We must therefore increase young people's access to education, in quantity, in nature, and in quality. We must enhance quantity by allocating less money to weapons of war and more to teaching, improving the status of teachers and building schools. We must enhance its nature by educating young people in human rights and in the rights of nature and of our surroundings, the better to develop values such as human and planetary solidarity instead of enmities born of the eternal dramas of history. We must enhance its quality by teaching and improving the learning of professions that could allow men and women, outside of university circles if need be, to feel creative and at the same time to feel a part of creation.

During this session, many Heads of Delegation have spoken of meagre results and of the difficulty of moving forward with all the goals of Rio. By emphasizing the education of young people, we have the key to guarantee that those who come after us will have their soul set upon the defence of what the founding fathers and mothers of Rio described in Agenda 21. Maybe some States have problems totally controlling polluting emissions; maybe other States cannot yet conform to reductions in the production and export of toxic waste to the necessary extent. But nobody, no Government, has any excuse for not taking action to educate young people and instill in them the morality of the Rio Declaration. Let us now engage in a sustained global effort of education.

The education of young people is the future of Rio. The participation of youth in the decision-making process can become a very important part of Rio's present. It will be possible to apply the conclusions of Agenda 21 only with the participation of all organizations and human actors. Agenda 21 hoped that young people would have access to governmental organizations so that they could make their voices heard in decision-making. Five years later, we must acknowledge that the thermometer of success in this area shows a low temperature.

In conformity with the statement of Prime Minister Marc Forné Molné to the General Assembly last year and with the directives of Minister of Foreign Affairs Albert Pintat, Andorra has sought to work actively on initiatives that favour the inclusion of youth in the decision-making process. At the end of 1996, for example, we were present at the World Youth Forum at Vienna. Andorra is also one of few States that contributes financially to the youth fund of the United Nations. Andorra succeeded also in including in the text of the Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development a commitment regarding dialogue between generations geared towards more participation for youth.

Because we come from a small State, Andorrans know well that we cannot alone determine the health of Andorra's nature and ecosystem. We know that we are members of an ecological whole which is interdependent at the regional level and, in the end, at the level of the planet: we know that if rain in the Pyrenees becomes scarce, water will falter in Andorra; that if the Amazon jungle disappears, our fellow citizens will suffer the consequences. We cooperate closely within our immediate region, the Pyrenees mountains, through participation in the Environment Commission of the Pyrenees task force. Also in the context of the Pyrenees, we must highlight the organization by our Ministry of the Environment of the first Andorran environment forum, on the theme "Residual waters in the framework of an integral management of waters in mountain zones", in which a large number of highly regarded scholars participated.

Water is an indispensable resource and will probably be the crux of debate in the twenty-first century. It is one of the constant concerns of the Andorran Ministry of the Environment. In recent years, Andorra, following European directives, has been working on the preparation of a comprehensive plan for water sanitation. The construction of sanitation plants and collectors and the management of Andorra's potable water resources has been one of our Government's priorities.

Much effort by the Andorran Administration has also been focused on the preservation of our mountain forests. To be a mountain country means to have clear duties towards the environment, duties which we have the will to respect. In this sense we salute the Kyrgyz initiative to have the year 2000 declared the international year of mountains, an initiative that we enthusiastically endorse.

The education of young people and participation by young people: these form the basis of Andorra's statement in today's debate, in keeping with the spirit and the letter of Rio. With the optimism, the courage and the energy of youth, we shall build the world of the coming decades; and with our activity we shall give the Earth a deserved rest.

"Rest, rest, perturbed Earth!
O rest, thou doleful Mother of Mankind!" (*William Wordsworth, "Invocation to the Earth", 1816*)

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Andorra for his statement.

Mr. Juli Minoves-Triquell, Chairman of the delegation of Andorra, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I wish on behalf of my delegation to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this important special session. In the same vein, I pay tribute to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, who has been remarkably active since assuming his post. This augurs well for the United Nations performing its functions in a better manner.

My country is pleased at the increasing interest in the environment shown in recent years by the industrially and scientifically developed countries. We invite the developed countries to move forward and translate their words into deeds. May Almighty God forgive them for the damage they have caused on Earth and in outer space. Although our suffering in developing countries is as old as our existence, it an affliction of a different kind: our suffering stems from backwardness, while the problems they face are the result of progress.

Poverty is no longer an environmental problem for us. It has become a descriptive term, a label. Desertification is no longer an environmental danger, but is a qualifier. In this way, we speak of "sub-Saharan" countries or "desert" countries. Desertification has thus become a name.

Drought is no longer a temporary, seasonal phenomenon, but a continuous state. It has become a hostile element forcing people to seek new places of shelter, which creates yet another problem, that of human migration in the aftermath of the destruction of all animal and plant life.

Marine pollution caused by oil tankers, by the dumping of waste and by wastes from chemical factories, especially in the Mediterranean, along with over-fishing, have all but killed off the remaining marine species, in addition to polluting the beaches with petroleum waste. This has greatly diminished the potential to exploit these resources.

Mines laid in our land when foreigners used it as an arena for their wars have made cultivation impossible. These mines are still a hateful reminder of those times, and continue to kill and maim. Epidemic and endemic diseases resulting from environmental backwardness, such as malaria, bilharzia and other harmful parasite-borne illnesses, are destroying the lives of millions of people in the third world. Ignorance, the root cause of all environmental problems, is still predominant.

That was a brief summary of the most important of the very old environmental problems which are a continuing reality for the developing world, to which we belong. These are the problems of the developing world — not ozone, not carbon dioxide. We welcome cooperation in those areas too, but alongside such cooperation we would rather cooperate on our older major environmental problems.

We need to feel deeply and sincerely for each other's problems and environmental concerns so that we can collectively tackle environmental problems. All parties should contribute according to their abilities and their means. In our country, we have implemented two phases of a multi-phase project which is one of the most important environmental water projects in the world aimed at combatting drought and desertification. I refer to the great man-made river, which, regrettably, has been technologically boycotted by the richest and most advanced country in the world. This project is being implemented in spite of the technological boycott and the funds-transfer embargo imposed on Libya; when it is completed, it will move more than 6 million cubic metres of water daily to the distant desert from the coastal areas through a 5,000-kilometre network of four-metre pipes.

In our view, we should both light a candle and continue to curse the dark. In this respect we call for the following: first, we must intensify research and studies on sea-water desalination with a view to developing the best and most appropriate methods in this field at the least possible cost, for there is no life without water. God Almighty said in the Holy Koran,

> "And Allah has created from water every living creature". (*The Holy Koran, XXIV:45*)

Second, we must intensify research and studies aimed at the development of plant varieties that are more resistant to drought. It should be possible to develop international projects to establish belts of such plants in desert areas in order to restore a small part of the plant cover that has been lost over the last few centuries and to arrest the deterioration of the limited remaining plant cover.

Third, we must develop new irrigation technologies to help save water and to make the optimal use of water. Such technologies and the material needed to implement them should be made available at a reasonable cost.

Fourth, there must be assistance in the production of all types of pumps — deep and surface pumps, suction pumps and pressure pumps — that can operate on solar and wind energy at the least possible cost. This will enable us to benefit from underground water in the desert and other areas.

Fifth, there should be assistance in carrying out geological studies, whether by modern technologies such as satellite remote sensing or by conventional methods, as part of an international effort to discover underground water sources in areas that need such water. This can be done at the regional level as well, since national studies are usually insufficient.

Sixth, we need enhanced research to develop new crop varieties resistant to higher salinity, if only for the production of certain types of animal fodder. This would make it possible to use highly saline water in agriculture.

Seventh, mines must be cleared, and the relevant maps must be handed over to the countries concerned; these countries must also be given assistance by teams of experts who could help in mine clearance and train local people. All the equipment needed for detecting and clearing mines must also be supplied.

Eighth, there must be an international initiative to eradicate malaria, bilharzia and all other harmful parasites within a specific time-frame; the countries concerned should then be provided with what they need to maintain the cleanliness of their environment in the future.

Ninth, we must create an international climate conducive to sustainable development. This necessitates the following: respect for the sovereignty of States and for their right to live a free and independent life; no political or economic strings should be attached to assistance; there should be no imposition or threat of boycotts or embargoes; the assets of others must not be frozen, and no restrictions must be imposed on their freedom of movement, because this hinders development and sustainability; it is imperative not to commit, threaten or encourage aggression, but instead to have recourse to dialogue and negotiation among States; bilateral, regional, interregional and international cooperation should be encouraged on the basis of equal benefits and equal sacrifices; and there must be no attempt to impose national legislation internationally.

Tenth and last, before it is too late we should address the problems of the cultural environment. This is already being polluted both from the surface of the Earth and from outer space with a view to imposing the culture of the rich and powerful on the deep-rooted cultures of the rest of humanity. This can have very grave consequences. Let us enter into a dialogue about this phenomenon before we are forced to convene a special session of the General Assembly devoted to this important and serious question.

May God guide the steps of the members of this Assembly, and may his peace and blessings be upon them.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for his statement.

Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kim Hyong U, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Kim Hyong U, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Kim Hyong U (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is with great attention and high expectations that the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is participating in this special session, which is taking place at a crucial moment when there is a growing need for international cooperation, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, to achieve the common goal of the well-being and prosperity of humankind.

The current session provides an opportunity to review the progress achieved in implementing the commitments of Agenda 21 adopted at the Rio Earth Summit and to explore ways and means to give impetus to the recent process of their implementation. This session is therefore very important in consolidating the common efforts of the international community for sustainable development.

During the five years since the Rio Earth Summit, active national, regional and international efforts have been made to implement Agenda 21 in accordance with the principles set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; these have brought about positive results in a number of areas.

Major achievements include the emerging international partnership to achieve sustainable development through joint efforts, and the increased awareness of and support for sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels.

Economic growth, social development and environmental protection are inseparable from sustainable development, whose ultimate goal is to promote the well-being of mankind through generations. In particular, sustainable development is inconceivable without economic growth.

However, we are well aware that there still exist imbalances and unfair aspects in international economic relations, which will eventually impede sustainable development worldwide. The developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, have been further marginalized from the mainstream of the world economy, and the gap between the developed and developing countries is still widening.

Worse still, the issues regarding poverty alleviation, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, human settlements and external debt have not been dealt with in a proper manner that would promote sustainable development. In particular, financial and technological assistance to the developing countries have continued to decline due to failure on the part of the developed countries to implement sincerely the commitments made under Agenda 21. This has a negative impact upon the efforts of the international community to achieve sustainable development.

The implementation of Agenda 21 represents a global undertaking for the present and the future. Accordingly, it requires a sense of common responsibility on the part of the international community as a whole. It also requires individual Governments to discharge their respective obligations in view of the fact that the level of development, capacity and specific conditions vary from one country or region to another.

In achieving sustainable economic growth and development, it is therefore essential to translate the Rio Declaration and political commitments into action and further enhance international partnership and cooperation on the basis of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

International cooperation should focus first of all on poverty eradication through the transfer of environmentally sound technologies on preferential and concessional terms and the allocation of sufficient resources for sustainable development, thus helping promote economic development in the developing countries. To this end, the current special session should be seized as an opportunity for Member States to recommit themselves to promoting the overall implementation of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 by redoubling their ongoing efforts at the national, regional and international levels.

There is a need for the provision of additional and new financial resources for environment and development. In this context, the fulfilment of commitments by the developed countries to reach the accepted United Nations target of directing 0.7 per cent of gross national product towards official development assistance still remains essential. At the same time, appropriate measures should be taken to curtail the present trends of unbalanced foreign direct investment in order to make it possible for it to serve the sustainable development of the developing countries.

New initiatives and measures to promote the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries should be contemplated in the spirit of pursuing the common prosperity of humankind. On the other hand, the external debt issue should be resolved in a way that will relieve the heavy debt burden of the least developed countries and other developing countries experiencing economic difficulties.

Programmes and funds under the United Nations system, including the Global Environment Facility and other environmental organizations, should rationalize their modes of cooperation and be supported by adequate resources so that they will be able to provide effective cooperation for the implementation of Agenda 21.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has for a long time attached great importance to land management and environmental protection. It has regarded this as being directly linked to the promotion of the people's well-being and the future of the country.

Ever since the Rio Summit meeting, further attention has been given to formulating national development plans that are conducive to the sustainable development of the country, and nationwide efforts are also being made for their implementation.

In particular, having recognized the importance of land management and environmental protection in attaining sustainable development, the Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il, Chairman of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea National Defence Commission and Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, took measures to merge various environmental organs and established the State Environmental Protection Commission under the Administration Council. As a result, environmental protection efforts have been further strengthened, ensuring the effective use of natural resources and the monitoring of environmental protection throughout the country.

Along with these efforts, the Government enacted relevant laws and regulations on land management and environmental protection and took various measures to ensure their strict observance in all its activities. It is also making every effort to fulfil the obligations and responsibilities it assumed as a State party to world environmental conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea pledges itself once again to make continued efforts to implement the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and to participate actively in the global efforts to make our life on our planet peaceful, safe and prosperous.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement.

Mr. Kim Hyong U, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan.

Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is a pleasure and an honour for me to speak at this important session on behalf of the President of the Republic of the Sudan, Mr. 'Umar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir. I bring you his greetings. He is most concerned with environment and development issues. He participated in the Rio Conference, but pressing circumstances have prevented his presence here.

Allow me to express my country's support for the statements made by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, and by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Chairman of the Group of 77 and China.

Agenda 21 gave hope for millions of people whose optimism was fuelled by the end of the cold war and the promises made by the leaders of industrialized countries that they would provide 0.7 per cent of gross national product as development assistance to developing countries and that they would enter into an international partnership to achieve economic development, sustainable development and the protection of the environment.

Now, five years on from the Rio Conference, those promises are far from being fulfilled because the industrialized countries lack the political will to keep them. Five States have achieved the Rio objective of 0.7 per cent, but overall, industrialized countries have provided 0.25 of their gross national product for development. Industrialized States continue to use the pretext of common responsibility to avoid their principal and direct responsibility for the deterioration of the environment due to harmful consumption patterns and the increase in carbon dioxide emissions and harmful wastes.

Furthermore, those States have not transferred technology to developing countries and have put protectionist obstacles in the way of exports. They impose environmental criteria without, in turn, allowing the exports of developing countries to reach the markets of industrialized countries. We believe that environmental threats go beyond political and geographic borders. We must agree on appropriate formulas for cooperation to reaffirm the right of human beings to a sound environment without harming the sovereignty of States.

We have heard encouraging statements from some leaders of industrialized countries. However, the test will be action and not words. The Rio decisions remain empty slogans. The sad fact is that our developing countries in Africa are forgotten and marginalized. In many cases, official development assistance, which is the backbone of development in Africa, has decreased or been non-existent. The number of people living in poverty in Africa has increased while foreign debt and the servicing of that debt continue to crush our societies and paralyse our economies. The international community merely gives promises to Africa while demanding that it bear the challenges and repercussions of the globalization and privatization of economies and compels African countries to implement corresponding measures without due consideration to their specific circumstances.

The Sudan believes that it is, first and foremost, responsible for its own development. However, like other developing countries, we are not responsible for the underdevelopment that we have inherited. At the same time, we believe that the international community has the ethical responsibility to correct this injustice. What we are calling for is justice. We are not seeking to put unjustified burdens on others. Therefore, the problem of African debt, a problem which takes 30 per cent of our export revenues, must find a just, durable and non-discriminatory solution. The international community must seriously turn its attention to stemming the tide of poverty and working seriously to eradicate it, in line with the commitment to the right of people to live in dignity, with shelter, food security, education and health. That can only be achieved if industrialized countries fulfil their commitments.

The Sudan, with its million square miles, is the largest country in Africa. The longest stretch of the mighty Nile runs through it. We have a huge underground reserve of water. Therefore, agriculture is the mainstay of our economy. The natural resources of the Sudan make up the broad basis of an integrated environmental fabric, and the State has therefore been increasingly concerned with the environment and its links to development. This, in turn, was reflected in the objectives of the Comprehensive National Strategy for Development for the period 1992-2002.

The Sudan accepted the decisions of Rio on the basis of our belief in the close link between development and the environment. We were among the first States to ratify the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and participated actively in negotiations thereon. We ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, along with the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol.

In the institutional field, the Sudan created a Ministry for the Environment and the Supreme Council for the Environment and National Resources, which has branches in all provinces. In coordination with the Ministry and the various environmental units, the National People's Assembly in the Sudan created a Committee on the Environment and National Resources. In the field of legislation, the Sudan has enacted a comprehensive environmental law to bring Sudanese legislation into line with international conventions and the decisions taken at Rio. Many universities in the Sudan have set up environmental faculties, and environmental studies have become part of high school curricula. Primary school students take part in reforestation and environmental protection efforts as a preparation for the introduction of these subjects into their curricula. In 1995, the Sudan had 305 registered voluntary organizations. Most of them work in the field of environmental awareness and development. Unfortunately, donor circles seem merely to want to finance foreign organizations, and our national organizations have been prevented from effectively participating in that field.

With a view to implementing the Comprehensive National Strategy, the President of the Republic enacted a law ensuring that 17 million acres would be maintained as forests or pastures or for wildlife. A National Commission was created to implement the Montreal Protocol. Since 1992, the Sudan has been implementing projects to develop selected regions through popular participation and the increased participation of women. The Sudan has prepared a national programme to combat desertification and a five-year plan is being prepared to set aside and protect areas threatened with desertification. A long-term national programme is being prepared. We are also implementing a strategic planning project to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development and a capacity-building project in the field of climate change.

All these projects have been implemented with the support of the United Nations Development Programme. The project for the Dinder game reserve and the project for preserving the genetic resources of domestic animals await financing.

Desertification has led to a deterioration of the vegetation cover, which has affected agriculture, pastures and wildlife and has led to soil erosion in the countryside. The latest studies show that 37 per cent of the Sudan is threatened by this phenomenon. This in turn has led to the exodus of peoples from those areas to the cities, with the ensuing sanitation and housing crises.

The fight against poverty is a bulwark of sustainable development and the Sudan has therefore begun to implement integrated programmes to eradicate poverty, including charitable and solidarity funds and productive family projects. The project for developing renewable sources of energy is an effort to protect the forest cover.

The Sudan has effectively cooperated at the regional level, participating in all the environmental protection bodies created by the Arab League and the Organization of African Unity. Our participation in the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development helped to create an effective organization in this field. The Sudan has put forward a project for developing the Red Sea environment within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Unfortunately, appropriate funding has not been found.

The Sudan believes that peace is the means to achieve sustainable development domestically. We believe in a just and lasting solution to the problem in southern Sudan in accordance with the principles of the Charter, Rio Principle 27 and article 20 of the World Charter for Nature. We are convinced that military activity harms the environment and hampers development and stability and have therefore sought to achieve peace with the factions fighting in the south of the country.

A Political Charter was signed in 1996 and was then expanded into the Khartoum Convention on peace, which was signed by eight of the rebel factions in April 1997. The Convention grants the people of the southern Sudan all their demands for self-determination and the sharing of power and wealth within the framework of the principle of citizenship equal in rights and obligations. The State is now preparing projects for rehabilitating, rebuilding and developing the south of the country. The United Nations Development Programme has agreed to finance projects in selected areas of the south for development.

From this rostrum, I appeal to those brothers who continue to bear arms to join the peace treaty, which is open to all. It is not directed against anyone, because hopes can be fulfilled only through peace and negotiation, not through weapons, which only further destroy the environment and hamper development.

In conclusion, we believe that the environment is a gift of God to the whole of humanity. Threatening the environment will harm all, rich and poor alike, whatever geographic borders separate them. Let us stand shoulder to shoulder to obtain a better future for all our children.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan for his statement.

Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: May I make two requests? First, may we all cooperate and keep to our seven-minute limit? Secondly, there is too much noise in the Hall. This is a General Assembly meeting. Please respect the decorum of the house.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Eldar Kouliev, Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Eldar Kouliev, Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): The convening of a special session of the General Assembly at such a high level is convincing proof of the outstanding role played by the Rio Summit in the theoretical analysis of global trends of world development on the eve of the next millennium.

For Azerbaijan, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was doubly significant, since it was the first global forum under United Nations auspices attended by the representatives of my country after the restoration of the independence and sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Republic in late 1991. I need not mention the enthusiasm with which we received the decisions of the Rio Summit, the quintessence of which was Agenda 21, unanimously adopted by the international community.

Our firm adherence to the concept of sustainable development has not been abstract in nature, but is dictated by the harsh realities faced by Azerbaijan in the late twentieth century. Decades of destructive and unlimited exploitation of the rich natural — mostly mineral — resources of my country brought the unique ecosystem of Azerbaijan to the brink of catastrophe. The one-sided economic structure imposed on Azerbaijan in the last decades of the nineteenth century, at the dawn of the first "oil boom" — subsequently supported and consolidated by the totalitarian, centrally planned Soviet economy — resulted in the stunning fact that, by 1997, almost 4 million tons of extremely toxic waste containing heavy metals had been accumulated on the territory of a relatively small country of 86,000 square kilometres and a population of 7.5 million.

A serious danger threatens the Caspian Sea, whose unique bio-resources — first and foremost its valuable stocks of sturgeon — are on the verge of vanishing. The concentration of heavy metals in the shallow Caspian seabed exceeds the average level by more than 100 times. In the late 1980s, more than 15,000 tons of oil and oil products, 20,000 tons of mineral acids, 800 tons of dissolved iron and 500 tons of phenols were discharged annually into the Caspian basin.

Air pollution has reached a critical level. In 1988, the discharge of hazardous substances into the air was almost 2.5 million tons, of which 93,000 tons of sulphur dioxide, 638,000 tons of carbon oxide, 82,000 tons of nitrogen oxide, 1,665,000 tons of hydrocarbons and 37,000 tons of volatile organic substances.

The process of soil degradation in Azerbaijan is also continuing at a frightening pace. At the beginning of this decade, about 30 per cent of the total land resources of Azerbaijan were affected by water and wind erosion. The total area of salinized lands reached 1.5 million hectares.

It seemed that the scale and degree of the environmental problems which Azerbaijan faced might serve as an ideal test for the implementation of the principle declared in Agenda 21, according to which sustainable development can be achieved only through coordinated efforts at the national, regional and international levels. Let us take as an example the problem of preserving the Caspian fish stocks. It is true, Azerbaijan is only one of five countries catching sturgeon in the Caspian Sea and, in the absence of coordinated international policies and programmes on fish-stocks preservation, the unilateral actions of one State alone, however important it may be, cannot guarantee the desired effect.

The same goes for the problem of the transboundary transportation of toxic waters. At the end of the last decade, more than 12 billion cubic metres of contaminated sewage was discharged annually into the Caspian Sea, of which 95 per cent came from the Volga river and 500 million cubic metres were transported to Azerbaijan via the transit rivers Kura and Araks from neighbouring countries.

Unfortunately, the realities faced by Azerbaijan as it reestablished its statehood put paid to many of our illusions and hopes.

The armed aggression methodically waged by the Republic of Armenia against my country from 1991 to 1994 resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, the loss of almost 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan and the appearance in the country of more than 1 million refugees and displaced persons.

Combined with the natural difficulties inherent in the transitional period — difficulties experienced also by the other countries that are in the process of transforming their centrally planned economies into market economies — the consequences of Armenia's aggression constitute the main obstacle to a thoroughgoing improvement of the ecological situation in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, despite the enormous difficulties that our Republic is facing, the five years that have elapsed since we regained our independence were not wasted from the standpoint of improving our country's environment.

We are gradually establishing a legal basis for environmental protection. In this connection, we note first and foremost the adoption in 1992 of a law on environmental protection and the use of natural resources, as well as the fact that we have devised an ecological framework for our country and set priorities for State policy in this area. These include protection of the biosphere, the sustainable use of natural resources, the reduction and disposal of waste, the rational use of energy, and the reduction of risks posed by human activities. The implementation of this strategy is to be backed up by a national plan of action for the environment, currently under preparation by specialists from my country with the support of the World Bank.

Twelve laws are also being elaborated that will regulate various aspects of the rational use of natural resources in Azerbaijan. We have also acceded to a number of international legal instruments that form the basis for international cooperation in the area of environmental protection, *inter alia,* the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

A number of bilateral and multilateral agreements have been concluded on cooperation in the area of the environment, including an agreement on cooperation and ecological protection between Azerbaijan and Turkey; a protocol on cooperation between the Ministry for the Environment of the United Kingdom and the State Committee for the Environment of the Republic of Azerbaijan; and a cooperation agreement between British Petroleum and the State Committee for the Environment in the area of ecology.

We are steadily developing international cooperation on the Caspian Sea. In 1991, the first international conference on the problems of the Caspian Sea was held in Baku; representatives of 158 countries participated. November 1993 saw the holding, also in Baku, of an international ecological exhibition, "Eco-Khazar 93".

An international coordinating council on cooperation to resolve the problems of the Caspian Sea has been set up and is functioning smoothly. Its work is actively being supported by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank. A joint expert group working within the framework of the Caspian Initiative, after studying the ecological situation in the Caspian littoral States, prepared a draft programme for regional cooperation, which was endorsed in Tehran in 1994.

The Government of my country hopes that the successfully developing international cooperation in the area of the environment will start bearing fruit in the near future, not only in the areas that I referred to but also in resolving other urgent problems that face our Republic, in particular improving the supply of drinking water for our population. In this respect, a project for Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, has been worked out and is being successfully implemented with assistance from the World Bank.

The twentieth century started for Azerbaijan on an optimistic note. The first "oil boom" gave rise to great hopes for harmonious — or, as we say nowadays, sustainable — development, in which industrial progress does not destroy nature but, on the contrary, gives rise to the material conditions for improving the environment.

Today, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, our mood is optimistic. And again, our optimism is largely due to the promising development represented by the huge oil deposits of the Caspian Sea. Nature is more patient and wiser than man. Once again it has given us a chance to make use of its riches, but this time we must be careful. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan for his statement.

Mr. Eldar Kouliev, Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan.

Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): In the five years since the Rio de Janeiro Conference, obvious changes have taken place in the substance and the dynamics of the phenomenon of development. These changes are characterized by accelerated globalization, stronger tendencies towards regional integration and uneven progress indicators in individual regions. For some States, these were years of successful economic growth and improved social conditions. For others, they were years of trial, especially for those countries not at peace, which could not make progress towards sustainable development and which therefore could not fully implement the recommendations of Agenda 21.

In the Republic of Tajikistan, because of the civil conflict that swept the country, important tasks such as integrating social and environment conservation goals with economic plans and programmes and the introduction of new approaches to securing ecologically sound development have receded into the background. As members know, in recent years efforts by the President and the Government of the country have mainly been devoted to restoring peace and tranquillity and creating conditions for engaging the people in economic activities.

In the context of the considerable progress achieved towards the peaceful settlement of the inter-Tajik conflict, with the support of the United Nations, the observer States and their mediation, it is expected that tomorrow, on 27 June 1997, the General Agreement on Peace and National Accord will be signed in Moscow, and that the efforts of the country's authorities will then enter a new, vigorous and constructive phase. Of course, the Government of Tajikistan bears the main responsibility for establishing peaceful living conditions and normalcy in the country and for adopting efficient measures to accelerate the revival of the country's economy in the post-conflict period.

We understand that the support of the international community in this transitional period will to a great extent depend on how quickly difficulties can be overcome as we move from civil confrontation to the building of a normal, peaceful society. The Government of Tajikistan is resolved to carry out this difficult, multifaceted task at minimum cost.

Obviously, in the short term humanitarian assistance will still have to be provided to those residents of the country who have suffered as the result of the military conflict, in order to ease the severity of the crisis and to reduce human suffering at this difficult stage.

But the most important thing now is that the prospect of peace makes it possible for my Government to focus on tackling unresolved problems with redoubled energy. This means, first of all, the accelerated rebuilding of our devastated social and economic infrastructure; the return of people to their homes and their social and psychological adjustment to their new living conditions; and the active involvement of our citizens in economic activities — in a word, the creation of favourable conditions for the democratic development of Tajik society.

From this standpoint, we believe that the recommendations expected of this session will be important, as they will emphasize the interaction of peace, security and sustainable development.

From the practical standpoint, Tajikistan hopes that future efforts to implement the decisions of the Rio Conference will give priority attention to such issues as ensuring sustainable energy, transportation, agriculture and drinking water supplies.

Our country's geographical location makes it important for us to continue our efforts at the early identification of possible environmental disasters, and at the speedy elimination of their effects. In this connection, we should make resolute efforts to heighten our readiness to respond to environmental emergencies with life-saving and rehabilitation efforts and by strengthening relevant global and regional tools and strategies.

Ninety-three per cent of the territory of the Republic of Tajikistan consists of mountains. As a mountainous country with specific and unique environmental and climatic conditions, Tajikistan considers it especially urgent to give greater attention to the preservation of biological diversity and natural mountain ecosystems. In this connection we support the proposal of the Kyrgyz Republic to proclaim the year 2000 as the international year of mountains. We believe that the formulation of a comprehensive plan of action within the framework of such a year would enhance our common efforts to ensure the sustainable development of mountainous regions.

Today, Tajikistan is vigorously working to make the transition to a socially oriented market economy. The economic reforms undertaken by the Government against the background of the ongoing peace process promise improved living conditions for our people. However, reality requires a frank view of the state of affairs: without favourable external conditions we will not be able to deal in the short term with either rehabilitation or reconstruction. First and foremost, we need the donor community to continue its noble efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups of the population, along with external support for our economic reforms. We need an inflow of investment into Tajikistan, more active involvement by our export sectors in international trade, and gradual integration into international financial and commercial systems.

In spite of all the difficulties that have beset my country, we are prepared, in cooperation with other States, to advance within the guidelines laid down in Agenda 21, to strive for tangible results in our environmental protection efforts, and to achieve social justice and economic growth.

All these elements of the concept of sustainable development are of equal importance to us, and they are indivisible.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan for his statement.

Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I give the floor now to His Excellency Mr. Naste Čalovski, Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Naste Čalovski, Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Čalovski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Let me begin my statement, Sir, by expressing my delegation's great satisfaction at seeing you, the eminent representative of friendly Malaysia, presiding over the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to sustainable development.

The Republic of Macedonia is a beautiful country on the Balkan peninsula. We have many beautiful lakes and rivers, many forests, beautiful mountains and valleys, a mild Mediterranean climate and a healthy and educated population. We have no doubt therefore that we should do everything necessary to avoid endangering this blessing, for we have no right to endanger it. Our obligation is to see to it that our development is sustainable and that our environment remains protected from pollution and other dangers. To put it simply, this is because Macedonia does not belong to the present generation only; it belongs also to our future generations.

In the opinion of my delegation, the priority aim of the present special session is to reaffirm the commitments made at Rio in Agenda 21, and to make solemn commitments that they will be implemented in the years to come. Is the special session prepared to act so that this aim will be achieved? Our answer is "Yes". Not doing this would be a big step backward with unforeseeable difficulties for the development of international cooperation. Preparations for this session were thorough on the national and the international levels, in the United Nations in particular, so we hope that the session will succeed. If we truly adhere to the concept of sustainable development and to the idea that we live in an interdependent world, on one planet, if we are truly ready to act, if we have the political will to act, the result of our deliberations will be positive.

What are we doing in the Republic of Macedonia and internationally to implement the Rio commitments of Agenda 21? The Republic of Macedonia is a European country with a market economy in transition. That position requires the adoption of basic and specific policies in all fields of development. As a follow-up to the Agenda 21 commitments and to other international commitments such as the European ecological action plan, and aiming to attain high European and world standards, my Government has adopted a national environmental action plan, copies of which we can make available to interested delegations. It is an important achievement and a proper tool to credibly follow a sustainable policy, to protect our environment and keep it healthy and to keep our country's natural habitat beautiful. The action plan will be successful if our economy grows, if we have success in trade, if we have foreign investment in our country: in short, if development in our country goes on continuously, acquires all elements of a continuous process, and is sustainable.

Our national environmental action plan sets out in a very specific manner what should be done to improve air and water quality and to improve solid waste management, biodiversity conservation, the renewal and preservation of our forests, and so on.

Of course, the realization of these purposes depends in the first place on us, but international cooperation is also necessary, and in some areas is essential. For example, in order to secure additional investment in the field of ecology, the debt-for-ecology swap methodology is of the utmost importance: cancellation of part of a country's external debt in exchange for increased environmental protection, along with other elements.

The future development of the Republic of Macedonia very much depends on the situation in our neighbourhood and on the manner and speed with which European integration proceeds. The globalization of the world economy and of international trade will be welcome if it avoids the marginalization of the smaller and weaker economies. The liberalization of world trade and the improvement of market access are essential if economies are to develop. It is essential that the present trend in development assistance be reversed to reach 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance. This is of particular importance to many developing countries, especially to least developed countries and to landlocked and small island States.

All sectors of the population should be involved in this effort. Civil society should be encouraged to have an even more active profile. It is essential that the global and regional sharing of information be improved. We should be aware not only of the global environmental problems but also of the success stories.

The need to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases is everybody's concern. The forthcoming conference at Kyoto will be a very important event in this respect.

To achieve progress on all these points, international cooperation is a must. As far as my country is concerned — and, I think, also for the other countries of our region — the essential thing is that the Balkan countries become part of European integration as soon as possible. The best investment in the Balkans from the political, economic and social standpoints would be "Europization", not "Balkanization".

Every effort should be made to ensure that this session ends successfully. My delegation is working in that direction. In future, the most important thing will be the implementation of the Rio commitments, of Agenda 21 and of the commitments that will be agreed upon at the present session. This will significantly help the realization of the call by the General Assembly that by the year 2000 the Balkans should become a stable zone of cooperation and development.

I shall be supplying the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General with copies of my country's national environmental action plan.

The President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for his statement.

Mr. Naste Čalovski, Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: The next speaker is Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Diouf (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) (*interpretation from French*): The Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro gave a strong impetus to thought and action on ensuring sustainable development and environmental conservation. An irreversible change in outlook was indeed needed in the light of the major challenges of the twenty-first century: improving the well-being of a growing population, notably by eliminating hunger and poverty, and safeguarding the resources of our planet for the survival of future generations.

To face these challenges, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) restructured itself and formed a Sustainable Development Department, thus ensuring that a future-oriented perspective would be an integral part of the policies and projects of the sectoral departments of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and economic and social affairs. FAO embarked on an ambitious programme of decentralization that would bring its experts closer to the realities on the ground and to the needs of rural communities.

As task manager for four chapters of Agenda 21, the organization, in collaboration with its partners, has refocused its policies, programmes and projects with member States. The idea of sustainable agricultural and rural development has been conceptualized and defined through dialogue with partners. A new, integrated approach to land-use management and land protection has been developed and is gradually being put into effect. National forestry action programmes have been developed and implemented in many countries. Finally, a special effort has been made with respect to the management of mountain areas.

In addition to its specific responsibilities for these four chapters of Agenda 21, FAO also is also playing a key role in a number of other areas. The first is the definition and implementation of rational policies for the utilization of water resources. Water is a very precious resource that will become increasingly scarce. In this connection, it should be noted that agriculture is by far the largest consumer of water, accounting for 75 per cent of total offtake, while irrigated agriculture provides 40 per cent of the world's food production.

The second area is the drafting and adoption of a code of conduct for responsible fisheries. Third, we are working on the renewable energy needed for agricultural production and processing. Fourth, we are cooperating with our partners under the Climate Agenda and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Fifth, we give active support to the Convention on Biological Diversity and are working with the Convention secretariat to develop a joint programme on agricultural biodiversity. Sixth, we support the Convention to Combat Desertification, whose first conference of parties will take place in Rome in early October at the joint invitation of the Italian Government and of FAO.

The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Food Summit were natural extensions of the Rio Summit. The Heads of State or Government and other high-level representatives of 186 countries, meeting at Rome in November 1996, pledged to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, *inter alia* by providing a stable political environment based on respect for all human rights, by ensuring equality of opportunity for all, particularly for women, and by adopting social and economic policies that would encourage public and private initiative while at the same time safeguarding the environment. More specifically, they undertook to involve the people and grass-roots organizations more closely in the framing and implementation of specific plans and programmes for the sustainable management of natural resources: water, soil, plant and animal material, oceans, forests and climate.

FAO is convinced that the food requirements of the world's population as a whole can be met for decades to come in the framework of a system of sustainable development. In order to achieve that goal, appropriate measures must be taken here and now to build national economic environments conducive to investment in the primary sector and acts of international solidarity must give the most disadvantaged rural populations control over water resources and access to effective technologies, modern inputs, credit and markets.

The resounding message from Rome is that sustainability and food security are inseparable and that agriculture and the rural world must feature in any debate on sustainable development. In this context, the early implementation of international agreements, such as the Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Leipzig Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources and the three Conventions directly emanating from Rio are of great urgency. Moreover, the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests — notably through the FAO-led Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests — constitute a fundamental stage towards the consolidation of a collective approach to natural resource management.

FAO remains convinced of the value of the commitments made in Rio five years ago. The full implementation of the decisions taken at the Earth Summit and at the World Food Summit will lead us to a better world and a healthier life, with the environment safeguarded and peace and justice on our planet.

The President: I thank the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for his statement.

Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Mr. Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Al-Sultan (International Fund for Agricultural Development): At the Earth Summit in Rio five years ago, the international community reached a new consensus on the imperative of meeting the needs of present generations while safeguarding the interests of future ones. Since Rio, three important international Conventions on environmental issues have entered into force, and several sectoral programmes have been agreed. Many countries have elaborated national programmes based on Agenda 21, while multilateral institutions have sought to bring environmental sustainability to the centre of their operations.

Yet if one poses the question of whether poor people and fragile environments are better off today, the honest response would have to be one of some disappointment. Indeed, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) has underlined that the global environment has continued to deteriorate. Of course, the amount of additional resources mobilized since Rio has been small compared to the numbers invoked there. This is certainly one factor underlying these disappointing trends.

There are, however other, elements. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was among those that argued forcefully at Rio that poverty alleviation must be the principal cross-cutting theme of Agenda 21. In this connection, I am glad to note that the CSD has recently reiterated that the eradication of poverty is one of the fundamental goals of the international community.

Nonetheless, there is still a tendency to give attention to individual and sectoral environmental issues, rather than to look at sustainable development in a broader, more integrated and people-centred sense. Specific environmental concerns are often more in the nature of symptoms. As important as it is to deal with them, the goal of the Earth Summit was to address the underlying causes often rooted in poverty and the unsustainable pattern of resource use.

The rural poor are often seen as culprits contributing to environmental degradation. They are in reality the victims. In degraded areas small farmers, herders and forest dwellers often have little alternative but to overuse or misuse land and water and to cut down trees for fuel in their struggle for survival. The resulting degradation worsens their poverty, giving a further twist to the downward spiral. This vicious cycle must he broken so that the rural poor can act in defence of the natural resource base on which their livelihoods depend.

The key to doing this is to promote what we call an enabling micro-level environment. Major elements of such an environment are a demand-driven extension system that offers to poor farmers viable conservation-oriented technologies, together with a rural financial system that would give them access to credit, financial inputs and small investments. The availability of fair, nearby markets and at least a minimal infrastructure in the form of roads and communications are essential.

With more than 470 poverty projects in the rural areas of 112 countries over its two decades of operations, IFAD has acquired extensive experience in supporting interventions to foster such a micro-environment. They have shown promise in breaking and even reversing the negative links between poverty and environmental degradation. An IFAD project in the Niger shows how relatively modest community-led interventions, based on local knowledge and action, can make a big difference. The project there has helped to test, upgrade and make widely available traditional soil and water conservation techniques such as "demi-lunes" to collect water and traditional planting pits known as "tassas". As a result, crop yields have improved significantly, both under normal and deficient rainfall conditions. These simple, cheap and easily replicable techniques have been widely adopted, even outside the project zone. Large areas of previously eroded and barren land are being brought back into productive use.

One of the outcomes of the Earth Summit, the Convention to Combat Desertification, does in fact respond to these broader concerns. Moreover, for the first time in environmental law, the rural poor and their communities are cast as the central part of the solution rather than being seen only as the problem. If properly implemented in its true spirit, the Convention is likely to be one that will directly help improve the lives of millions of poor and food-insecure peoples living in semi-arid and dry-land zones.

In view of the potential of the Convention to Combat Desertification, IFAD is supporting countries in the early stages of its implementation by helping prepare national programmes and by financing investment projects to build a supportive environment at the local level. These activities are based on our experience of interventions such as that in the Niger, with the aim of creating conditions which allow poor farmers working within their own organizations — particularly women — to protect the local environment while raising their output and incomes. Indeed, since the adoption of the Convention in 1994, IFAD has provided some $600 million in financing for projects and programmes in dry-land areas at risk from degradation and desertification.

Affected countries can do much to help themselves, not least through institutional and policy reform. But they cannot do it all alone. The Convention to Combat Desertification recognizes the importance of external resources to supplement domestic funding for effective national and local action. This is reflected in the establishment of a global mechanism to service parties to the Convention. The most important role for the global mechanism is to promote the mobilization and channelling of financing.

IFAD, on invitation, has submitted a proposal to host the global mechanism of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention. Our proposal envisages a global mechanism that would act in partnership with other concerned institutions to help improve the effectiveness of existing resource flows and catalyse new flows and sources of finance. It would also give particular attention to strengthening domestic resource mobilization and private sector involvement, as well as promoting a more effective blending of concessional resources and non-concessional external resources. The Convention to Combat Desertification has created enormous potential to help millions of poor farmers to reduce their vulnerability and food insecurity. IFAD intends to be at the forefront of the efforts to realize this potential fully.

The impact of Rio will not be measured by how many agreements are concluded between Governments. Indeed, its promise will start to be fulfilled only when real progress is made to reverse the degradation of marginal lands, forests, streams and coastal areas which provide homes to a large proportion of humanity. We at IFAD, with a mandate to focus on the rural poor, look forward to playing a full part in this noble and crucial enterprise on whose success depends our common future.

The President: I thank the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development for his statement.

Mr. Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: The next speaker on the list is Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association, speaking on behalf of the Farmers' Major Group.

Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. O'Brien (World Sustainable Agriculture Association): I am Denise O'Brien, a small sustainable farmer from the state of Iowa in the United States of America. Today, I speak to you as a mother and a farmer, for all the world's farmers, and not as a representative of the United States Government.

Until two years ago, my husband and I ran a medium-sized farm, milking 40 dairy cows and raising crops on approximately 80 hectares. Due to the debt crisis of United States farmers in the 1980s and the intensive industrialization of agriculture, we gave up farming as our only source of income. My husband now works full time away from the farm. We, like other farmers in the world, will spend a great percentage of our income over the next years on paying back the debt.

I now farm by myself full time. My crops are strawberries, raspberries, apples and asparagus, and I raise chickens and turkeys. These are for local consumption, and I try to maintain a strict regime of organic practices. My children, more than likely, will not farm. This age of industrialized agriculture presents few opportunities for someone to enter agriculture.

This story is not mine alone. It is a story repeated every hour of every day as more and more people leave the rural areas and leave farming. This is a worldwide phenomenon. The basis for food production on small- and medium-sized farms is eroding, as is the rural society that food producers have sustained.

It is under these auspices that I have been given the awesome task of speaking for farmers of the world. In my 21 years of farming, I have always fought the political battle of small- and medium-sized producers. During that time, I have had small farmers from around the world visit my farm, and I have visited small- and medium-sized producers in other countries. I do not pretend that I can speak on all the issues of farmers, but I do know that there are a number of common features that we all share.

We shared our experiences when we met at the Earth Summit and wrote the NGO Sustainable Agriculture Treaty, which states that it is an urgent necessity to:

> "Break with the dominant predatory model of agriculture in favour of new patterns of sustainability which are equitable and participatory, to guarantee the full control of the means of production and natural resources in the hands of the people who work the land, insuring them a permanent source of income and high levels of productivity" (*NGO Sustainable Agriculture Treaty, para. 10*).

We defined sustainable agriculture as:

> "a model of social and economic organization based on an equitable and participatory vision of development which recognizes the environment and natural resources as the foundation of economic activity. Agriculture is sustainable when it is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate and based on a holistic scientific approach" (*ibid., para. 11*).

As a woman farmer, I shared experiences with others when we met in Rome prior to the World Food Summit in 1996. Women wrote a statement there that declared there needed to be;

> "democratization of the access to resources especially land, water, seeds, and intellectual property; the promotion of sustainable agriculture and common-based resource management; the establishment of local, people-based trade systems and the infrastructure thereof; the empowerment of women through equal representation in decision-making bodies at local, regional, national and global levels; access to education for women in general and girl children in particular; access to credit and other financial support for women; rurally appropriate education, health, recreation, childcare and other infrastructural support systems designed by and for rural communities with consideration to both genders; concession of the right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral land".

We also shared experiences when La Via Campesina, a growing international movement of farmers, peasants, farm workers and indigenous peoples, met in April 1996 in Mexico and declared that:

> "Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right."

The industrial model of agriculture has caused social, economic and environmental devastation in our rural areas. Many farmers are questioning the sustainability of such a model. As a result, farmers are moving to more ecological production methods. There are governments that are supporting farmers in this transition. For example, organic transition payment initiatives, developed in the late 1980s in Denmark, Sweden and Germany, have been extended to farmers in 15 European countries under the common legal framework of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2078/92. There is also an example of government involvement in China's Green Food Programme. This is a semi-government organization and is a member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. The Programme limits the use of pesticides and increases the use of farm manures. One more example comes from my own country, the United States. This programme is called Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education and provides the opportunity for farmers to learn how to adopt sustainable practices.

Producing food entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially water, land and seed. Farmers who work the land must have the right to practise the sustainable management of natural resources and to preserve biological diversity. Genetic resources are the result of millennia of evolution and belong to all of humanity. Farming communities must have the right freely to use and protect the diverse genetic resources, including seeds, which have been developed by them throughout history.

We must understand, though, that all these efforts on the part of farmers, Governments and the private sector will be in vain as long as transnational corporations resist the use of sustainable development principles in their operations. None of us is going to witness or participate in a sustainable world as long as transnationals are not held accountable for their unsustainable use of the world's resources. As His Excellency President Mugabe of the Republic of Zimbabwe said in his speech at the first meeting of this session, on 23 June:

> "The World Trade Organization has assisted transnational corporations with global economic opportunities but has not inculcated in them responsibilities for the environment, as we are witnessing cut-throat competition and corporate avarice undermining the whole process of sustainable development."

I am not an economist. I am not a scientist or a researcher, but along with over 450 million farmers, I have what many of you need — a close relationship with our planet Earth. I urge all people to become involved with farmers in food production for local consumption. I urge all people to take the time to evaluate their lives in terms of the impact they have on the very nature of a healthy, livable planet. In order for all of us to survive on this finite planet, we must take into consideration every thing we do every day of our lives. We can only survive if we give back what we have taken.

The President: I thank Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association for her statement.

Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Sheku Syl Kamara of Peace Child International, speaking on behalf of the Children and Youth Major Group.

Mr. Sheku Syl Kamara of Peace Child International was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Kamara (Peace Child International): I stand before you here today as the sole representative of that half of the world's population which is under 25. I also represent a country, Sierra Leone, whose infrastructure has collapsed as a result of a military takeover of the democratically elected Government. My country has ground to a standstill. I came here via a dangerous car journey, a long walk across the border into Guinea and three nights sleeping on a pavement, waiting for my United States visa. However, I am thrilled and honoured to be here and want to thank the Government of Norway for supporting my travel and also the people of the United Nations Development Programme, Julian and Rosey at Peace Child International, and Ann Clifford and Seth Winnick at the United States Mission to the United Nations, who worked so hard to enable me to be here.

Since Rio, my country has been ravaged by civil war and increasing poverty, with their attendant problems of poor sanitation, gender inequality, lack of human rights and environmental degradation. What can young people do about this? The 100 young members of my group, the Sierra Leone chapter of Peace Child International, tried to organize a peace conference to bring together youth and political leaders to see where the problems lay. That conference did not happen — we could not raise the funds. You may ask: Would it have helped? Perhaps not, but it could have made young people aware of the issues and given them hope for a better future. That alone is worth it.

So I ask you, representatives: In future, please give financial support to initiatives by young people.

You promised to do so at the Earth Summit: Agenda 21, Chapter 25, paragraph 9 (g), promises to give support to programmes, projects and networks that encourage young people. Some initiatives you have supported, and my organization is extremely grateful to the Governments of Finland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Denmark and Sweden, which have supported the Peace Child Rescue Mission programme.

Young people need to learn the principles of sustainable development. We are anxious that education for this noble concept not remain a forgotten priority for the next five years.

We have found in Sierra Leone that, doing the Rescue Mission sustainability indicators in our communities, we learn very well the meaning of the concept. But I come here today to issue an ultimatum to Governments: Particularly in Africa, you have to do more to educate us in this concept. You are failing us. If we are going to learn how to sustain life on this planet, you have to make education on sustainability a central concept of school curricula. Young people of Rescue Mission and other groups want to do this, which is why we have created our own children's version of Agenda 21 and the Indicators Pack. But we can do little without your support.

So please, representatives: Support youth initiatives in education for sustainable development.

Young people can do so much to teach each other. Through the Rescue Mission network, I hear of girls aged 14 and 15 who are running primary schools alone in remote parts of Pakistan. In my country and throughout the world, young people are planting trees, seeding embankments to prevent erosion, carrying out programmes to protect coral reefs. We can do much, much more if you look to us as partners in this great global partnership for sustainable development.

But you, the Governments, must support us and take the lead. In this, the Governments of the third world, particularly in Africa, have an appalling record. You signed that document at Rio committing yourselves to partnership. You have not delivered. How many developing countries whose delegations sit here today include youth in their delegations? How many have consulted youth on the policy proposals they have been preparing over the last few weeks. Not many — perhaps none.

For the empowerment of today's youth, Peace Child Sierra Leone has launched a major initiative around the Day of the African Child to bring together youth with decision-makers. Young people will work all the hours God gives to sustain and improve life for future generations, but we need your help. We need the transfer of technology from the North to the South, which is very important to sustainable development.

I have heard this week Government after Government commit itself to the eradication of poverty. You said the same at Rio and at Copenhagen. Yet, in my country, poverty gets worse, not better. Life is short: most of my generation will be dead before we reach the age of most of you in this room. That is the result of poverty, my friends, and it is why most young people in countries like mine dream of getting away from the Godforsaken place where we were born to seek a better future and a longer life in Europe or North America. That is the opposite of sustainable development.

I believe that, if the idea of sustainable development is made the primary concern of every Government, much will be done to alleviate the problems. That is my main message to you: Get sustainable development at the heart of your Government policies, not somewhere on the fringes. You must support youth initiatives that will make young people like myself want to stay in our countries and generate homegrown prosperity.

Rescue Mission and I have developed a project called Sustainable Development Training Centres — Internet cafes where young people and others can learn about information technology and sustainable development in the same place, while at the same time providing efficient business services at a profit. The project won the support of the United Nations system-wide World Youth Forum held in Vienna. It is also my hope that the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the European Union will act upon the principles established in Rio and provide the funding to set up these Training Centres.

It may seem ridiculous to try to set up such a thing in Sierra Leone right now, but the idea of this project gives me hope. I know that it can happen and give support to thousands of other young people like me, so I trust you will support the projects. I trust that they will be successful and that, as a result, there will be a storm of youth initiatives for sustainable, ecologically friendly enterprises which can bring both financial and environmental security to young people in countries like mine.

I repeat: Please, representatives, support youth initiatives for sustainable enterprises.

Give us hope in a benighted world where we seem to be sleepwalking into the twenty-first century, without a map or a candle. Most young people grow up in fear of crime, mass unemployment and total disillusionment about a world wedded to short-term interests and careless of the long-term needs of future generations like ours.

Thousands of young people die every day from curable diseases while $3 million a minute is spent on arming ourselves against each other. We do not seem able to find the $17 billion needed to create a population stabilization programme that would ensure that humanity does not, like a plague of locusts, destroy the planet which gives us all life. The future must rise to the top of our agendas if it is to exist at all.

Education, funding, partnership — those are the three priorities identified by youth at the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. I repeat them to the Assembly today and beg, plead and cajole members most fervently to support our youth initiatives, which will give us real responsibility and a stake in implementing that future of which Agenda 21 gave us such a bold and tantalizing glimpse.

The President: I thank the representative of Peace Child International for his statement.

Mr. Sheku Syl Kamara of Peace Child International was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America.

Mr. William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, was escorted to the rostrum.

President Clinton: Five years ago in Rio, the nations of the world joined together around a simple but revolutionary proposition: that today's progress must not come at tomorrow's expense.

In our era, the environment has moved to the top of the international agenda because how well a nation honours it will have an impact, for good or ill, not only on the people of that nation but all across the globe. Preserving the resources we share is crucial not only for the quality of our individual environments and health but also to maintain stability and peace, within nations and among them. As the father of conservation in our nation, John Muir, said,

> "When we try to pick anything out by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe".

In the years since Rio there has been real progress in some areas. Nations have banned the dumping of radioactive wastes in the oceans and reduced marine pollution from sources on land. We are working to protect the precious coral reefs, to conserve threatened fish and to stop the advance of deserts. At the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, we reaffirmed the crucial importance of cooperative family planning efforts to long-term sustainable development.

Here in America, we have worked to clean up a record number of our toxic dumps, and we intend to clean 500 more over the next four years. We have passed new laws to better protect our water, created new national parks and monuments and worked to harmonize our efforts for environmental protection, economic growth and social improvement, aided by the Council on Sustainable Development.

Yesterday, I announced the most far-reaching efforts to improve air quality in our nation in 20 years, cutting smog levels dramatically and, for the first time ever, setting standards to lower the levels of the fine particles in the atmosphere that form soot. In America, the incidence of childhood asthma has been increasing rapidly and is now the single biggest reason our children are hospitalized. These measures will help to change that, to improve the health of people of all ages and to prevent as many as 15,000 premature deaths a year.

Still, we here have much more to do, especially in reducing America's contribution to global climate change.

The science is clear and compelling: we humans are changing the global climate. Concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at their highest levels in more than 200,000 years and climbing sharply. If the trend does not change, scientists expect the seas to rise two feet or more over the next century. In America, that means 9,000 square miles of Florida, Louisiana and other coastal areas will be flooded. In Asia, 17 per cent of Bangladesh, land on which 6 million people now live, will be lost. Island chains such as the Maldives will disappear from the map unless we reverse the predictions.

Climate changes will disrupt agriculture, cause severe droughts and floods and the spread of infectious diseases, which will be a big enough problem for us under the best of circumstances in the twenty-first century. There could be 50 million or more cases a year of malaria. We can expect more deaths from heat stress; just two years ago, here in the United States, in the city of Chicago, we saw the tragedy of more than 400 of our citizens dying during a severe heat wave.

No nation can escape this danger; none can evade its responsibility to confront it. We must all do our part — industrial nations that emit the largest quantities of greenhouse gases today, and developing nations, whose greenhouse gas emissions are growing rapidly. I applaud the European Union for its strong focus on this issue and the World Bank for setting environmental standards for projects it will finance in the developing world.

Here in the United States we must do better. With 4 per cent of the world's population, we already produce more than 20 per cent of its greenhouse gases. Frankly, our record since Rio is not sufficient. We have been blessed with high rates of growth and millions of new jobs over the past few years, but that has led to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions in spite of the adoption of new conservation practices. So we must do better, and we will.

The air quality action I took yesterday is a positive first step, but more must follow. In order to reduce greenhouse gases and grow the economy, we must invest more in the technologies of the future. I am directing my Cabinet to work to develop them. Government, universities, business and labour must work together. All these efforts must be sustained over years, indeed over decades. As Vice-President Gore said on Monday,

> "Sustainable development requires sustained commitment".

With that commitment, we can succeed.

We must create new technologies and develop new strategies, like emissions trading, that will both curtail pollution and support continued economic growth. We in the developed world owe that to ourselves and equally to those in the developing nations. Many of the technologies that will help us to meet the new air quality standards in America can also help us to address climate change. This is a challenge we must undertake immediately and one in which I plan personally to play a critical role.

In the United States, in order to do our part, we must first convince the American people and the Congress that the climate change problem is real and imminent. I will convene a White House conference on climate change later this year to lay the scientific facts before our people so that they understand that we must act, and the economic facts so that they understand the benefits and the costs. With the best ideas and strategies, with new technologies, increased productivity and energy efficiency, we can turn this challenge to our advantage. We will work with our people, and we will bring to the Kyoto Conference a strong American commitment to realistic and binding limits that will significantly reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases.

I want to mention briefly three other initiatives that we are taking to deal with climate change and to advance sustainable development here and beyond our borders.

First, to help developing nations reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the United States will provide $1 billion in assistance over the next five years to support energy efficiency, develop alternative energy sources and improve resource management to promote growth that does not have an adverse effect on the climate.

Secondly, we will do more to encourage private investment to meet environmental standards. Our Overseas Private Investment Corporation will now require that its projects adhere to new and strengthened environmental guidelines, just as our Export-Import Bank already does, and as I hope our allies and friends soon will. Common guidelines for responsible investment clearly would lead to more sustainable growth in developing nations.

Thirdly, we must increase our use of new technologies even as we move to develop more new technologies. Already we are working with our automobile industry to produce cars by early in the next century that are three times as fuel-efficient as today's vehicles. Now we will work with businesses and communities to use the sun's energy to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels by installing solar panels on one million more roofs around our nation by 2010. Capturing the sun's warmth can help us to turn down the Earth's temperature.

In all of our cultures, we have been taught from time immemorial that, as Scripture says,

> "One generation passes away and another comes, but the Earth abides forever." (*The Holy Bible, Ecclesiastes, 1:4*)

We must strengthen our stewardship of the environment to make that true, and to ensure that, when this generation passes, the young man who spoke just before me, and all those of his generation, will inherit a rich and abundant Earth.

The President: I thank the President of the United States of America for his statement.

Mr. William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 6.40 p.m.

United Nations
A/S-19/PV.9

General Assembly
Nineteenth Special Session
Official Records

9th plenary meeting
Friday, 27 June 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail .... (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Moore (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mrs. Njie-Saidy (Gambia): The commitment of the Gambia to sustainable environmental management was formalized as early as 1977, in the formulation and adoption of what we call the Banjul Declaration. In that document we embraced the rational exploitation and utilization of our flora and fauna. Since then, however, the precautionary, efficiency and intergenerational-equity principles have influenced both policies and programmes in the natural resources and environmental sectors.

It was therefore not surprising that we went to Rio with a developed National Environmental Action Plan. This provided the framework to indigenize Agenda 21 and the international conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification and drought.

The National Environmental Action Plan is set within and encapsulated in the Programme for Sustainable Development. It takes into account the demographic picture of the country, the mainstreaming of women and the social sectors of health and education as they impinge on the environment. The National Vision 2020 document also takes a long-term view of environmental concerns. The institutional arrangements to enforce and implement the provisions of the Rio instruments include, for example, an executive council, an agency, technical networks and functional working groups built on the programmes for implementation. The implementation process has so far established an efficient and effective regulatory, policy and coordination framework and a committed and indeed increasingly aware stakeholder constituency.

We are, however, constrained by institutional weaknesses. These range from inadequate skills in project planning, implementation and monitoring to environmental policy analysis, impact assessment and environment legislation, among other areas.

Inadequate support systems in the form of donor inflexibility, for example, and limited capacity for decentralization also pose additional problems. We have, however, learned valuable lessons as we endeavour to transform these constraints into opportunities for improvement. A bottom-up approach enhances sustainability in environmental management, and joint action through periodic participatory reviews and monitoring, for example, has been an effective tool to elicit and incorporate feedback into policy and programme planning and implementation.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

The Gambia ratified both the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the international Convention on Biological Diversity in June 1994, and the Convention to Combat Desertification in January 1996. With regard to the implementation of the Climate Change Convention, we have compiled a national inventory of sources and sinks of greenhouse gas emissions in the Gambia. The report indicates that land-use change and the forestry sector are currently the highest emitters of trace gases in the Gambia, with annual net emissions of 1.6 million tons of carbon dioxide, and overall results show that more carbon dioxide is emitted than any other gas, with a total emission level of more than 1.8 million tons.

A study on the Gambia's vulnerability to climate change has also established that economic sectors such as crop production, range and livestock, water resources, forestry and natural terrestrial ecosystems, fisheries and coastal resources, as affected by the sea level, are potential victims. Also under study are management measures and policy options to mitigate the predicted effects of greenhouse gas emissions. These will be translated into policy objectives and programmes for the sustainable management and utilization of our climate system in the Gambia.

The thrust of the Gambia's implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity resides in the creation of a protected area system. To date, four protected areas and two wetland sites have been identified and gazetted. Plans are also in progress to designate and protect other ecologically sensitive and representative sites. Our ultimate aim in the Gambia, therefore, is to bring about 5 per cent of the total land areas of the country under protected areas. Our ultimate aim will be facilitated by a country study to map out our biodiversity endowments as a whole. The Global Environment Facility provided funds for this purpose in July 1996 and work was begun in earnest in December.

The implementation of the provisions of the Convention to Combat Desertification has, *inter alia*, entailed a review of the forest policy, with revisions calling for extensive public and private sector participation in the programmes. Local communities can now own and manage their own natural forests. For consistency, we have also revisited the Forest Act and Regulations in a participatory process. A similar national consultative process has been set in motion to elaborate a national action plan for desertification control, which will be harmonized with the initiatives to implement the Biodiversity and Climate Change Conventions. In the interim, however, through community forestry, more than 10,000 hectares of land, particularly forest land, is being managed by local communities in the Gambia. Our intention is to put at least 50 per cent of all national forest lands under community ownership and management.

The issue of poverty was perhaps one of the most important concerns under Agenda 21. In this connection, the Gambia is currently implementing a Strategy for Poverty Alleviation to improve the lives of vulnerable groups in particular and ordinary Gambians in general. A corresponding National Poverty Alleviation Programme has been developed for the first cycle of the Strategy, from 1996 to 1999. Important elements in this Strategy include the development of gender-sensitive food-security policies and improvements in the agricultural sector to enhance the increase of disposable incomes. This is all aimed at generating increased demand for non-agricultural goods and services and ultimately, of course, to stimulate growth in the rural economy in the Gambia. The programme has a rural credit and micro-credit component for small-scale enterprises. It also aims to develop human resources through education, training and support to primary health care delivery.

When we entered these contracts at Rio, of our own free will, we were all well aware that we did not control all the relevant variables to weave together our economic, social and environmental policies and programmes to ensure sustainability in development. This certainty is indeed rare at the level of individual Governments, let alone in a situation of partnership between Governments of developed and developing countries. This uncertainty, however, also provides the *raison d'etre* for this nineteenth special session, to ascertain critically the inroads we have made and the hurdles we have yet to overcome.

Nevertheless, we all pledged our collective will and common resolve to implement the provisions of the contracts which we freely entered into at Rio. The difficult and protracted negotiations and the intellectual, expert and statesmanlike efforts that made these agreements possible reflected the goodwill and good faith of all Governments concerned. The ratification and effectiveness of these instruments sealed our epoch-making agreements.

However, the constraints cited as obstacles to implementation during this review session tend to indicate the persistence of the contentious and also cross-cutting issues of additional financial resources, technology transfer, information sharing, training and institutional capacity-building and the unfulfillment of our differentiated responsibilities under these provisions.

In this connection, the Gambia fully endorses the position of the Organization of African Unity and of the Group of 77 and China on these clusters of issues, as expressed in the statements of His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe and His Excellency the President of Tanzania who are also the respective Chairmen of the Organization of African Unity and of the Group of 77 and China. Specifically, we advocate increased official development assistance, more transparent and democratic financial mechanisms, the transfer of suitable and environmentally benign technologies on concessional terms, the reorientation of technical cooperation to respond to the forces of demand in developing countries in such a way as to utilize and build indigenous expertise, the development of human resources and an improvement in the management systems and processes that run our institutions. Thus, while we do not advocate a renegotiation of these issues, it is imperative that we rekindle the spirit of Rio and muster the will and the courage to work — to work as genuine and committed partners towards the attainment of its lofty ideals, both in the interest of the present generation and that of our children and grandchildren and generations to follow.

Let us remember that we hold this earth in trust for them and should be accountable to them.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia for her statement.

Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable William Harrington, MP, Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia.

The Honourable William Harrington, MP, Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Harrington (Zambia): Allow me in the first instance, on behalf of the delegation of Zambia and indeed on my own behalf, to join other countries in congratulating the President on his election to preside over the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of Agenda 21. Our thanks and deep appreciation also go to the Secretary-General for having steered successfully the preparations for this session.

On our road to Rio, Zambia made an assessment of its prospects for environment and development integration. Our report to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development identified the fact that many environmental problems in Zambia arose as externalities to the process of development and that these environmental problems could be overcome only through the process of development itself. It is this assessment that led us to have a strong conviction as to the principles and goals of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, especially Agenda 21.

During the five years since Rio, there have been successes and failures at both national and international levels in implementing the concept of sustainable development. In Zambia, we have undertaken significant steps to implement the Rio consensus. Zambia has so far ratified all the conventions negotiated at Rio and since then.

At the policy level, we have continued to build on our National Environment Action Plan, which we elaborated in 1994, expanding it to make it more encompassing of all the aspects of Agenda 21. Zambia, however, still hopes to elaborate a distinct national Agenda 21 in order to deal with sustainable development issues in a more coordinated way. Our Environment Action Plan has identified six main areas for action, namely deforestation, land degradation, water pollution, inadequate sanitation, air pollution and the depletion of wildlife resources.

Deforestation continues to be a major problem, especially around peri-urban areas due to the exploitation of forests to use their wood as fuel. Sensitive woodland areas also continue to be threatened. Efforts to increase agricultural productivity are hampered by land degradation, the resource base upon which crop and livestock production is based. The incidence of drought, which has been prevalent in the 1990s, has further contributed to environmental degradation.

Poverty in Zambia, just as in most developing countries, is the single most important factor undermining sustainable development and compromising prospects for future economic growth. The socio-economic dimensions of development are the underlying cause of the degradation of natural resources. In Zambia, a number of poverty-reduction strategies were put in place before and after Rio. Despite these concerted efforts, millions of Zambians continue to live in poverty. It is our view that this issue cannot be dealt with merely as a local matter. It requires both local and international solutions, given the nature of the globalization of world economies.

Except for two years since Rio, Zambia has been unable to register positive growth in its gross domestic product, despite my Government's very determined effort to put in place comprehensive reform measures in the private and public sectors. These reforms are expected to lead to economic growth in the future. There are, however, associated adverse effects of these reforms, which has made it difficult for the Government to increase expenditure on social services such as education, health and water, thereby negatively affecting the poor who are the most vulnerable group. In order to survive, this group turns to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, thereby causing further environmental degradation which, in turn, contributes further to their poverty status.

The other important issue related to poverty in Zambia is external indebtedness. Zambia is currently carrying an unsustainable external debt of over $6 billion. This translates to 204 per cent of gross national product. Although a number of creditor countries have assisted with bilateral debt relief, there is still a greater and urgent need for a durable solution to the debt issue, including multilateral debt.

The problem of declining official development assistance and the almost non-existent appropriate technology transfer has negative repercussions on environmental management and poverty reduction. The promise made at Rio to increase official development assistance has, to a large extent, been unfulfilled, despite having put in place appropriate measures to create an enabling environment for investment that included the enactment of an investment law and the creation of an investment centre to provide investors with a "one-stop" service facility.

Zambia notes, however, with great pleasure the announcements of pledges made by the European Union and other countries to increase official development assistance to developing countries, especially those in Africa. It is the hope of my delegation that these commitments will be fulfilled.

I have taken time to talk about the challenges posed by these socio-economic factors to our sustainable development efforts in order to underline the fact that the past five years may not have been enough to reverse the trends that have been shaped for decades. We hope to see the next five years have a real positive impact on national and international efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Despite our readiness to forge ahead in our efforts for sustainable development, we foresee a number of hurdles that need to be overcome. The strategy should be to revisit some of the implementation issues, especially science and technology, trade and environment and financing of sustainable development. Once these issues are addressed, it is our hope that we shall be able to move forward with the confidence that sustainable development is indeed attainable.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm Zambia's commitment to the spirit of Rio. There is as great a need for us to implement Agenda 21 now as there was in 1992. Let us move forward with greater determination. The political will of my Government cannot be doubted and Zambia will play its part in the full implementation of Agenda 21.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia.

The Honourable William Harrington, M.P., Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I would like to appeal to remaining speakers to respect the limit of seven minutes for their statements.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Diallo, Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea.

Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Diallo, Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Diallo (Guinea) (*interpretation from French*): It is with real pleasure that I join my voice to those who have spoken to welcome the convening of this special session of the General Assembly on environment and sustainable development. My delegation feels that this session represents an important phase in our collective consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of our common action to implement Agenda 21 in light of the commitments we have undertaken.

In this regard, we are compelled to note that, despite the various professions of faith expressed, achievements have fallen well short of our hopes. This has become a source of real concern today about the will of the industrialized countries to display a spirit of solidarity and to cooperate in the international community's struggle for the environment and sustainable development, the wellspring of progress and well-being for all. That is why my delegation greatly appreciates the convening of this session, whose recommendations will enrich and consolidate the progress made by the international community in its efforts to attain sustainable development.

In the framework of development policy for the entire rural sector, Guinea has made considerable planning efforts through a series of sectoral plans, including those for health, population, housing, communication and culture. In this context, environmental action is a priority and environmental policy aims at optimizing the economic and social system in its entirety on two broad fronts: the management of renewable natural resources and the improvement of living standards through the reduction of poverty and balancing of inequalities.

In practice, Guinea's environmental protection policy is an updated frame of reference for all sectors striving for the goals envisaged. Following the Rio Summit, the Government made great efforts to meet its challenges, though these efforts were limited by budgetary constraints. In response to all these concerns, my Government created the Ministry of the Environment and then drafted a National Plan of Action for the Environment that constitutes our national Agenda 21. This National Plan of Action, developed after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, takes into account both the principles laid out in the Rio Declaration as well as our national realities. Moreover, it prescribes international and subregional cooperation based on solidarity among peoples.

Guinea's efforts in the various spheres of socio-economic development are enumerated in a report on this subject, entitled *Sectoral Policy for the Environment*. Furthermore, a policy paper on population has already been drafted, based on six main objectives: the control of demographic growth; the improvement of the status of women, allowing them to contribute more actively to socio-economic development; the promotion of information, education and communications on population issues; improved living conditions for the vulnerable strata of society; the protection and conservation of the environment with a view to guaranteeing a decent future for generations to come; and the improvement of the institutional and technical capacities of the services responsible for collecting and analyzing demographic data.

Within the framework of the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, among other priorities, the protection of natural resources and the conservation of bio-diversity are at the core of Guinea's National Plan of Action for the environment. Thus, in the twofold perspective of implementing this environmental action plan and of its international commitments, Guinea has undertaken the development of a national monograph on bio-diversity.

With the support of the United Nations Environment Programme and financing from the Global Environment Facility, Guinea has tried to close this gap by drafting this national monograph on bio-diversity in two phases. The first consists of assembling and analyzing the documentary evidence of all available and accessible information, while the second phase will include a territorial inventory and a definition of conservation strategies and sustainable uses for our bio-diversity, as well as the elaboration of action plans and implementation programmes.

As to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, with the technical and financial support of the United Nations Environment Programme we are currently considering the elaboration of national communications and an implementation project for the Convention.

My country signed and ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. A National Committee for joint action in the implementation of the Convention, made up of representatives of all Government agencies and civil society, is responsible for drafting a work programme with the support of an interim secretariat. It is organizing seminars to disseminate information and enhance awareness of this Convention, which remains one of the important achievements of the Rio Summit.

These are the main activities undertaken by the Government of Guinea to follow up and implement Agenda 21. I wish to reiterate my Government's support for the tireless efforts of the international community to follow up and implement Agenda 21 and I urge the industrialized countries to work harder on behalf of the environment and development.

I wish to conclude by citing the example of the initiatives taken by the International Olympic Committee and its President, Ambassador Juan António Samaranch, to forge links between the goals of the Olympic Movement and those of environmental protection.

In order to safeguard the environment in a responsible manner, the International Olympic Committee has made environmental concerns one of the core elements of the Olympic movement. Not only must the organizers of international sports events take these concerns into account, but a city's record on environmental protection and the concrete measures it has taken to that end constitute a fundamental criterion in its selection as host of the Olympic Games. This explains the fruitful cooperation between the International Olympic Committee and all international organizations and relevant political and private authorities in the sphere of the environment.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea.

Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Diallo, Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Highness Mr. Turki Bin Mohammed Al-Kabir, Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

His Highness Mr. Turki Bin Mohammed Al-Kabir, Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Al-Kabir (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to congratulate Mr. Razali Ismail on his election to the presidency of this special session and to wish him every success.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia brings to this meeting a solid track record that reflects its policies as a member of the international community that aspires to develop its economy, protect its infrastructure and diversify its sources of income.

We share with the developing countries their aspirations and their sufferings as they pursue their development efforts. In this regard, I should like to comment on the policies and programmes of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the environmental and developmental areas. Based on the principles of our Islamic religion, they advocate that building for the good of humanity is man's basic function on this earth. For this reason, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia focuses on benefiting from its natural resources and the environment by using them to meet its current needs without affecting future generations and their right to sufficient resources.

Sustainable development and the protection of the environment is a primary concern of the Government of the custodian of the two holy mosques, at the national, regional and international levels. Our basic law of governance ensures the preservation and development of the environment and its protection from pollution.

The Kingdom has striven, through the Ministerial Committee for the Environment, to define future environmental priorities at the national level within the framework of sustainable development. To this end, a national Agenda 21 for Saudi Arabia was established that is in harmony with the Kingdom's policies. A national report has been prepared that chronicles the progress made in implementing this Agenda and makes recommendations on performance improvement in the future.

The achievements of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the field of development over the last three decades show that a large part of Agenda 21 is being implemented as part of its current development plan. On the regional and international levels, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a founder of the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment and of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment Programme. It has ratified the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol for the protection of the ozone layer as well as the Basel Convention on hazardous waste. It has also acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has participated in the activities of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change since its inception through its vice-chairmanship; in addition, Saudi nationals were among those who drafted the Panel's second scientific assessment report.

I should like in this context to express the concern of my Government regarding the selective manner in which Agenda 21 is being implemented. Certain aspects are being emphasized to the detriment of others, and we hope that all sectors will receive equal attention. The programme deals with many issues: water, air and land, as well as human activities that relate to environmental, economic, social and political aspects. Thus, we should work together to accomplish these common objectives, with the intention of helping all parties. Earth, our spaceship, is one planet, and we cannot deal with any of its elements separately.

The issue of combating desertification and drought is a matter of grave concern to the Government of the custodian of the two holy mosques. During the last two decades, our Government has contributed $1.682 billion to combat drought and desertification in African countries. We hope that the international community will contribute the necessary and appropriate financial support to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification so that this problem can be dealt with commensurately with other environmental issues, particularly as more than one billion human beings live in the area in question. Most of the countries affected are poor and lack the necessary scientific research facilities and technological and financial means.

We note that the Convention on Climate Change enjoys wide financial support. We hope that the industrial countries will assume their responsibilities and make available to the developing countries the financing required to deal with the problems of desertification, drought and poverty.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributes an average of about 5.5 per cent of its gross national product, or $72 billion, as assistance to the developing countries, from which 73 countries have benefited.

The slow implementation of programmes to alleviate the problems of desertification, drought and poverty contrasts with the active efforts to solve the problems that may result from climate change, which receive considerable support from the industrialized countries. We share with the international community its climatic concerns and seek to alleviate their effects. For in addition to the assistance I mentioned, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently working to enlarge the green parts of its coastal areas by using hylophytes utilizing sea water.

In this regard, I should like to express my appreciation for the efforts of the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) exemplified by their publications on indicators of sustainability. At the same time, we hope that the development of indicators which deal with what are "dangerous" emissions as stipulated in article I of the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

According to the basic principles in the third article of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the following should be taken in to consideration.

The countries parties to the Convention should adhere to the Berlin Mandate during the upcoming negotiations on a legal formula to strengthen the commitments of the industrialized countries of annex I of the Convention. This means that no new obligations should be imposed on the developing countries, and that no proposal should be made outside the framework of the Berlin Mandate, for example proposals on joint implementation, systems related to emissions trade permits or any other ideas that have been put forward but that add further obligations with respect to reducing the emissions of gases over developing countries. This is especially important since most of the countries of annex I have not met their commitments, whether to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000 or to meet their financial and technological obligations under the Convention.

We also feel that the States parties to the Convention should take into consideration the fact that developing countries depend on the production and export of fossil fuels. This would require that considerations be embedded in any proposed legal instrument emphasizing that the industrialized countries of annex I must closely adhere to their commitments as prescribed in the Berlin Mandate or in any other legal instrument, in particular policies and procedures related to energy. Here I would mention the following elements.

First, it is difficult to accept the imposition of further taxes on petroleum, which is already burdened by high taxes in the industrialized countries while coal and nuclear energy enjoy high levels of subsidies and tax incentives. These countries must eliminate such subsidies and must bring their taxes on those fuel resources into conformity with the level of pollution that they emit and must ensure that these are equal to the taxes imposed on petroleum products. I would like to note that the proposed taxes on petroleum are estimated to be about 15 times the assistance which industrialized countries contribute to the developing countries.

Secondly, it is difficult to accept the logic behind the industrialized countries' continued production of such fuels, especially petroleum, in all regions outside the developing countries, while at the same time taking all necessary steps to reduce the consumption of such fossil fuels internationally. The final result of this contradiction is a reduction in imports from the developing countries, not to mention the adverse effects on those countries, when it is known that they are dependent on such exports — and the majority are 90 per cent dependent on them for their income.

Finally, we must approve the principle of compensating developing countries whose economies are proven to have suffered from the steps taken by industrialized countries of annex I of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

This special session provides an opportunity for us to reaffirm our commitment to continued serious work on comprehensive consensus solutions to the environmental problems before us. That commitment will be a measure of our political will to face these issues effectively. We need solutions that can be attained only with deep and enlightened research and that are based on scientific fact, solutions that aim to be balanced and that take into consideration the international economic system and the interests of the economies of the developing countries in particular.

The Acting President: I thank the Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia for his statement.

His Highness Mr. Torki Bin Mohamed Bin Saud Al-Kabir, Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency the Honourable Mrs. Nino Chkhobadze, Minister of the Environment of Georgia.

The Honourable Mrs. Nino Chkhobadze, Minister of the Environment of Georgia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mrs. Chkhobadze (Georgia) (*interpretation from Russian*): The five years since Rio have demonstrated the wisdom of those who participated in preparing Agenda 21, which sets out a universal strategy for sustainable development and the basic principles for solving the most important problems facing the entire world community, as well as individual regions and countries. It may be one of the best documents of the latter years of the second millennium. The differing levels of success achieved by individual countries in solving the problems of sustainable development are obvious. One of the factors in such success is a nation's level of development, although this is not the decisive factor. A stable and purposeful State policy combined with international support can accelerate a country's development.

But the real situation in the world — when hundreds of hectares of forest are destroyed every year, when entire species of flora and fauna vanish from the face of the Earth each day, when the degradation of the environment is continuing, and when fewer and fewer natural ecosystems remain — compels us to reflect on whether humankind can move from discussion to action.

Georgia realizes full well that any global problem — world climate change, the disappearance of the ozone layer, the reduction of biological diversity — will be insoluble unless the solutions are found on the local, national and regional levels.

Owing to the economic crisis, Georgia is currently undergoing an artificial sustainable development. Our society associates the increase in the use of natural resources with emergence from the crisis and with the attainment of future prosperity: in other words, with unsustainable development. This is a characteristic of countries with economies in transition, and for this reason it is crucial to find a country-specific approach to implementing a country's economic policy, taking into account the need to conserve natural resources.

Georgia is not unique in its ecological problems. Besides the global ones, the basic problems high on our agenda are: forest conservation, clean water and hazardous toxic waste. To solve these problems, Georgia is creating action programmes on the national level. Our law on the protection of the environment creates a system of planning for environmental protection based on our long-term action plan, the Strategy for Sustainable Development. After approval by Parliament, the Strategy will be one of the fundamental documents determining the future development of Georgia.

The priority of developing the country based on the principles of Rio was reaffirmed in President Eduard Shevardnadze's recent statement supporting the World Wide Fund for Nature initiative known as Gift to the Earth. That statement underlined Georgia's readiness to place 20 per cent of its territory under various categories of protection and to create a legislative framework for protection of the environment and sustainable development.

To implement the principles of sustainable development, Georgia has incorporated into its national legislation the universal norms of environmental protection and its international obligations. Moreover, mindful of the need for a large-scale joint effort, Georgia has acceded to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, and several other conventions. We have begun work to create national programmes in these directions.

Georgia has participated actively in formulating a regional strategy and action plan for the protection of the Black Sea. The problem of pollution in the Black Sea is particularly important to Georgia. Currently, Georgia is formulating a national action plan and a system for the integrated management of coastal zones. The successful completion of these programmes will depend on the solution of our country's political, economic and social problems.

Georgia is one of the States of the Caucasus. The natural environment of the Caucasus, like that of any other part of the world, is unique and unreproduciable. This environment played a decisive role in forming the traditions and national characteristics of the peoples inhabiting that part of the world. Today, however, the region is troubled not only by economic fragility but also by ethnic, social and political conflicts. One of the principles of sustainable development is the prevention of such conflicts. Surely, the time has come for problems of environmental protection and the principles of sustainable development to be discussed at the negotiating table, for all of us are facing these issues. The Earth is one, and our economic problems are the same. This may be the thread that will lead us out of the labyrinth of complex economic, ethnic, political and social disagreements.

Our country has weathered a severe political and economic crisis in the recent past. Even today, many problems remain unresolved. In a country of 5 million people, there are 300,000 refugees and internally displaced persons, industry is operating at one-fourth of its capacity, unemployment is high and a significant portion of the population is living below the poverty level.

As the saying goes, "the wise learn from the mistakes of others, whereas the fool learns from his own". It is time for our planet to get wise and for the developing countries and the countries with transitional economies to stop repeating the mistakes made by many other countries in the past. To do so, we have simply to proceed from words to action.

Like the other former Soviet Republics, Georgia possesses energy-intensive and obsolete equipment and is in great need of new, sophisticated technologies to secure its emergence from the current economic crisis. This includes solutions to its social problems, the rational use of its natural resources and the opportunity to save for the planet what is left of its biodiversity. It is possible to do this and it is definitely worth trying. Only thus can global problems be solved. Our task is to protect the environment from humanity and for humanity.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment of Georgia for her statement.

The Honourable Nino Chkhobadze, Minister of the Environment of Georgia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Luc Ayang, President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon.

Mr. Luc Ayang, President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ayang (Cameroon) (*interpretation from French*): Five years ago in Rio, we recognized that peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indissociable. We also recognized that the problems of the environment, such as global warming, the destruction of coastal and marine ecosystems, the degradation of forests, desertification and the overuse of mineral resources are concerns not of any one nation or continent, but of the entire international community.

Aware and convinced that the survival of humanity is a collective responsibility, we decided in Rio to establish a new kind of partnership built of common yet differentiated responsibility in order to promote national, regional and world cooperation for development that we wished to be sustainable.

Accordingly, the developing countries committed themselves to doing everything to preserve and protect the environment, while the developed countries, beyond their ecological obligations, were to provide new and additional financial resources in order to create an international economic environment conducive to the struggle against poverty.

These were the principal objectives that we set for ourselves in Rio and which each country, according to its means, has been striving to pursue. Thus, Cameroon, for its part, has worked to develop internal legal provisions and appropriate structures, including, in particular, a law on the forest and animal regime; the institutionalization and organization of educational seminars on environmental problems; the creation of a national advisory commission for environment and sustainable development; and the development of a national plan of action for environmental management.

Regarding the national plan, I must stress that it was developed through a participatory approach involving international donors, public administrations, academic and scientific research institutions, the private sector, local communities, non-governmental organizations and professional organizations.

Other African countries have shown keen interest in our efforts. Together, we have been able to organize various meetings and to develop projects on marine and coastal ecosystems, fishing resources, the management of our forest and animal heritage, the management of waters and watersheds, and the protection of migratory species.

In this effort, we enjoyed widespread financial support from a number of international organs, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, as well as from several friendly countries. I wish here, on behalf of my country, to express to them our sincere gratitude.

Again within the framework of the implementation of its Rio commitments, Cameroon has made efforts to translate into reality the terms of the various conventions adopted. With regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Cameroon has stressed the conservation and management of forest and animal resources through the rehabilitation and creation of numerous protected areas throughout the national territory. Thus, 30 per cent of our national territory has been declared protected areas.

As to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, many actions have been undertaken, including a study on the global research initiative on world environment to monitor the forest cover in southern Cameroon and to forecast changes likely to affect climate and biological diversity; a pre-feasibility study, in cooperation with UNDP, on projects that could contribute to reducing atmospheric warming; and an inventory of greenhouse gases to determine their quantity and, ultimately, to take steps to reduce them.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa is strengthening the ongoing efforts of the Government of Cameroon, especially in the framework of Operation Green Sahel, to combat this scourge, which affects almost one quarter of our national territory.

Similarly, a national plan of action to combat desertification has been established with the assistance of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office to Combat Desertification and Drought to ensure the rational management of fragile ecosystems in semi-arid areas of the country.

As will be noted, Cameroon's actions to implement Agenda 21 are substantial, but it is clear that pursuing and stepping them up will require the active support of the international community. We must admit that the latter has responded but half-heartedly to the expectations aroused by the Rio Summit, five years after which, despite the commitments undertaken by many, our hopes remain far from fulfilled.

Indeed, the financial resources needed to implement Agenda 21 are cruelly lacking. The international economic environment, despite globalization, is characterized by a growing marginalization of the countries of the South, in particular those of Africa, whose economies are deteriorating and standards of living declining, thus increasing poverty.

During this session, we need not only to reaffirm the ideal of solidarity underpinning Agenda 21, but also and above all to translate it into concrete actions. For, quite clearly, no country or continent of the world can escape the fate of mankind as a whole.

The least endowed countries have committed themselves to making their contributions to the global effort to promote sustainable development in order to leave future generations a more secure and harmonious world. However, let us not forget that the countries of the South still face multiple challenges such as underdevelopment aggravated by the persistence of the economic crises, as well as other major obstacles such as the growing burden of debt and the ravages of endemic disease and hunger.

There is no doubt that the implementation of the commitments of Agenda 21 assumes the increased complementarity of efforts on the part of all countries. However, we believe that these efforts will bear fruit only if they are part of a global solidarity that takes into account our specific realities and the many developmental challenges that the countries of the South face today.

The Acting President: I thank the President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon for his statement.

Mr. Luc Ayang, President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Modibo Traore, Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali.

Mr. Modibo Traore, Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Traore (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): It is exactly five years since the international community sounded the alarm at the Earth Summit. The disturbing situation of the world's environment could plunge all mankind into unprecedented poverty during the next millennium unless all of us together move from expressions of good intention to specific action. The Government of the Republic of Mali welcomes this session, which should make it possible not only to take account of the activities undertaken since the Rio Summit, but above all to pave the way for a new partnership which alone can reverse the current suicidal tendencies of the inhabitants of our planet.

The scenario described at Rio is unfortunately still relevant. Poverty has been recognized as one of the main causes of environmental degradation. It continues to knock at our doors and to assail our eyes. In a desperate effort to survive, millions of men, women and children are obliged to draw on the last reserves of a nature depleted through over-exploitation. At this time, others on this same planet are bent on destroying through the volume of the waste they produce the last ramparts of our common house.

The concept of sustainable development approved by the international community as a whole combines economic, social and environmental dimensions. Of course, it also involves meeting our current and reasonable needs, but without compromising those of future generations. Likewise, the objectives of food security and meeting people's basic needs in terms of education, health care and access to potable water are at the centre of our development programmes.

It would be tedious to enumerate here my country's balance sheet of accomplishments made after the Rio Summit. While observers agree that the people of Mali on the whole live better today than they did five years ago, poverty is unfortunately still the daily lot of most of our fellow citizens. I wish to note the particular difficulties of our compatriots who live in rural areas, where resources today are very degraded because of overgrazing, deforestation, soil erosion, unsustainable agricultural methods and so on.

Environmental questions are cross-cutting in nature. We should therefore tackle them in a global manner. This requires that our actions be coherent and coordinated. In this connection, a higher environmental council was set up in 1995, with a technical secretariat responsible for coordinating governmental action in the field of the environment. In keeping with the recommendations of Agenda 21, the drafting of a national environmental plan was initiated. This plan is responsible for all programmes related to desertification, surface and ground water pollution, atmospheric pollution, poor sanitation suffered by rural and urban peoples, poor management of industrial and household waste and population growth and its impact on urban sprawl.

It gives me pleasure to announce today from this rostrum that the meeting to endorse this plan will be held very shortly. Our country will have a national plan for environmental action soon, in any case by October 1997, when the first Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Desertification will be held in Rome.

Combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought are of particular importance for our country, which well before the Rio Summit adopted a national plan to combat desertification. Like other Sahelian countries that are members of Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), Mali has for a long time endorsed sectoral priorities such as fresh water, energy and the sustainable management of forests. These help to bring about population stability, health and food security. However, because of lack of resources and the failure to mobilize the necessary resources to implement these initiatives, the large majority of them have suffered the same fate as that which today threatens Agenda 21.

We believe that the implementation of projects to combat desertification throughout the world means that the Convention should be given a specific financial mechanism for the speedy mobilization of resources. The international community must realize that this is not merely a formality on which one can economize. It is a *sine qua non* condition for the success of any endeavour undertaken in the framework of this Convention.

The sustainable management of natural resources, the combatting of pollution and environmental degradation, the development of human resources through the implementation of a population policy, education and health, regional integration, the creation of productive jobs in rural areas and through the development of the private sector in order to eradicate poverty — all these represent the strategic framework which will make it possible to ensure human sustainable development in our country.

We give our unreserved support to the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Since the beginning of the nineteenth special session, the highest authorities of the developed countries have spoken before the Assembly to reaffirm their determination to participate with the developing countries to combat poverty. We take note of these declarations and we welcome the new initiatives that were announced from this very rostrum.

Mali nevertheless hopes that the legitimate search for new approaches that are better adapted will not call into question the search for and mobilization of resources for the implementation of the initial Rio project, whose effects in mitigating poverty are unquestioned. Naturally, in order to attain these goals time is needed, perhaps a lot of time. We also need resources — a lot of resources. However, we need a real partnership based on a culture based on sustainability in order to create the necessary synergy of the efforts made by various sides. We must commit ourselves right now to spread the word of this new culture, one of sharing and solidarity among all peoples irrespective of borders and generations. We must succeed in this battle, first for ourselves and then for future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali for his statement.

Mr. Modibo Traore, Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain.

Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain, was escorted to the rostrum.

Sheikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am pleased, at the outset, to extend to the President our sincerest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the Assembly at this important session. We are confident that his expertise and abilities will help us realize the objectives for which this session is being held.

We are meeting today in this high-level international forum in order to follow up the achievements and progress made by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, under the banner of sustainable development. This second meeting, to review what has been achieved in the field of the environment and development, reflects the international political will that confirms and enhances the role of the United Nations as a forum for expressing the aspirations and hopes of the international community based on the concept of collective responsibility.

The aim of the Rio Conference was to entrench the concept of the preservation of natural resources and the protection of the environment in accordance with the concept of sustainable development. The State of Bahrain has acceded to a number of international conventions: the

Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and other regional and international conventions. This confirms Bahrain's keenness to support international and regional efforts to enhance the concept of sustainable development. We have also taken an active part in national, regional and international programmes that aim to preserve the environment and participated effectively in a number of international conferences related to the environment, such as, in a spirit similar to that of the Earth Summit of 1992, the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994. In addition, we adopted the Washington Declaration concerning the proper management of the coastal environment and sponsored the 1994 environment conference for the parties to the peace process in the Middle East.

At the national level, the State of Bahrain has restructured the executive body that deals with the environment. It has become an important executive mechanism in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment. We adopted an act on the environment in accordance with the Rio principles and the concept of sustainable development. This gave great importance to the environment and attracted the attention of the political leadership of the country. National committees were formed, bringing together governmental and non-governmental institutions to prepare for the implementation of Agenda 21.

We look forward to support from all the international organizations in helping us carry out an overall appraisal of the achievements made and prepare for a comprehensive national strategy to protect the environment in Bahrain. We have already set our priorities and laid down our national programmes, while taking into consideration their relevance to the implementation of Agenda 21 and focusing on chapters 4, 9 and 17 to 29 of Agenda 21. We have studied all the issues and focused on the private sector for planning and implementation.

Small island developing States, including Bahrain, are characterized by limited natural and human resources. However, we have a variety of environmental resources, such as coral reefs, seaweed and growths of mangrove. All this contributes to international environmental balance. In addition, Bahrain is a haven and a home for a number of endangered species, such as marine turtles, sirenians and some migratory birds.

In view of this, we were keen to establish nature reserves and adopt executive resolutions to protect marine and land creatures, as we did when we saved the endangered sirenian species.

We believe that United Nations agencies can explore further opportunities for studying islands and can use them as a model for programmes of sustainable development for other developing countries. We therefore call for a resolution on activating and implementing Agenda 21 and the Programme of Action that was agreed upon at the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We have to provide better opportunities for the practical implementation these programmes for these countries through various United Nations bodies, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and financial funds established in connection with international conventions.

We also need generous financial assistance, technical assistance and training for all small island developing States.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the President for the outstanding way in which he has guided the work of this session and for all the preparatory work that was done. We are looking forward to a final declaration on protecting the environment and enhancing sustainable development in order to protect our planet and provide for a decent life for future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain for his statement.

Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait.

Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): High-level international participation at this special session of the General Assembly is an indication of the significance attached by the entire world community to the question of environmental conservation and development. Our overriding and ultimate concern is to ensure a clean and safe planet that is hospitable and friendly to human life, now and in the future.

A thorough understanding of the entire spectrum of complex and interwoven issues is crucial. Effective and integrated international cooperation, as well as coordination and persistence, are essential for our common endeavours.

Kuwait accorded special attention to the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which was attended by His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait. Since then His Highness has personally followed the implementation of Agenda 21, which this special session of the General Assembly is convened to appraise. Five years have elapsed since the adoption of the Rio Declaration, and the State of Kuwait has now concluded an integrated national environmental strategy based on the principles and guidelines outlined in Agenda 21. A whole set of policies, measures and targets has now been developed to cover various areas, including the economy, natural resources, industry and energy.

Furthermore, the requirements and implications of the Rio programme of action are constantly being scrutinized and appraised in Kuwait.

As members of this Assembly are aware, Kuwait suffered what was probably one of the worst man-made environmental catastrophes of modern times when over 700 oil wells were set ablaze and millions of barrels of crude oil were spilled into the Gulf waters.

That disaster has had an enormous adverse impact on the implementation of the national programme and plan of action developed by the State of Kuwait for the protection of our environment. Following the liberation of Kuwait from the brutal Iraqi invasion, our chief national concern became the salvage of our environment and its total rehabilitation.

My country has been pursuing the implementation of programmes contained in the Rio Declaration through special national commissions set up to implement the agreements emanating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. To that end, two panels were established: the National Commission on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the National Commission on the Convention on Biological Diversity. In this context, the completion of the Kuwait National Strategy on Biological Diversity has been a landmark achievement towards the conservation and promotion of the ecosystems within our territories. Furthermore, a number of wildlife sanctuaries have been created.

In the public domain, through the National Assembly, Kuwait's legislative authority, the Environment Committee was established. This Committee approved a bill creating the Environment Board in 1995. The Board developed general policy guidelines for the conservation of the environment, in line with the principles of Agenda 21. The guidelines set major specific goals and measures aimed at the protection of the environment from pollution, the conservation of natural ecosystems, the monitoring of urbanization and housing, and scrutiny of the impact of the use of technology on human life and habitat. All this is carried out with our eyes and minds set on the maintenance of our national heritage.

Among our noteworthy achievements in the area of energy and petroleum was the initiation of a project to process lead-free gasoline and fuel for the domestic market. These products will be increasingly available to local consumers in October 1997. Further, several measures have been successfully introduced to reduce the negative impact of emissions from the burning of gases with high sulphur content.

In order to achieve sustainable development in the areas of agriculture, fisheries and livestock, and at the initiative of His Highness the Emir of Kuwait, preparations are under way to implement the national plan of action for modernization. Direct and indirect subsidies are also being provided to increase the yield of livestock, agricultural production and fisheries.

In the area of environmental protection, the Environmental Protection Act was updated in order to be more responsive to the requirements of sustainable development. The Act provides for the preparation of national plans and strategies for the prevention of air, water, soil, marine and land-based resources pollution. It also calls for laying down the principles and guidelines for assessing the environmental impact of different kinds of projects. Good progress has been made in the environmental monitoring of air, water and soil pollutants.

At the educational level, the State of Kuwait has made great strides in incorporating environmental concepts into school curricula at virtually all levels of education. Specific environmental disciplines, such as desert science, marine and oceanographic studies as well as health and ecology programmes, have been introduced into the education system.

In the five years that have elapsed since the adoption of Agenda 21, Kuwait has joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as an active member. It has also signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In this context, I wish to add that the State of Kuwait has developed a national strategy on biological diversity and efforts are under way to prepare a strategy to combat desertification.

Both the motive and the purpose of this special session are to pool our energies in a joint effort on behalf of humankind. The fact that we are meeting here under the auspices of the United Nations, the embodiment of the world's conscience, is yet another testimony to the universality of our exercise.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait for his statement.

Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Samhan, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Mohammad Samhan, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The convening of this special session of the General Assembly to assess progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 is an important step and a historic opportunity for the international community to analyse critically what has impeded the implementation of recommendations and decisions of the Rio Summit. At the same time, it provides an occasion to elaborate objective and constructive proposals on the environment and sustainable development.

Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The growing phenomena of poverty, desertification, drought, social backwardness, unemployment and debt in many developing countries represent the most serious obstacles in the way of implementing the recommendations and achieving the goals of Agenda 21. Indeed, all these obstacles undermine efforts towards development. Therefore, Member States, the developed nations in particular, international development organizations and the private sector must fulfil the commitments they undertook in Rio, especially in terms of the transfer of environmentally sound technology and the provision of financial and technical resources, with a view to creating an equitable, fair and just international economic and social environment that would ensure the incorporation of the efforts of the developing countries into the implementation of the overall strategies of sustainable development and environmental protection.

Ever since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the United Arab Emirates, in accordance with the orientation policies of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, aimed at developing human resources while paying close attention to sustainable development and the environment, has been keen to focus its energies on the protection of the environment and the prevention of its pollution.

In 1992 the United Arab Emirates established a high-level environmental commission. In 1993 it set up a national environmental board whose objective is to elaborate environment-related projects and measures designed to put an end to environmental degradation. The goal of these agencies is lay down principles for linking environmental concerns to overall planning.

Given the link between natural resources and industrial, agricultural and human-resources development, my country has been keen to conserve these resources in a sustainable manner and has been preparing a draft national strategy and a plan of action for the environment, to be concluded in the next two years.

In this context, our Government has implemented programmes for combating desertification, expanding "green areas" and developing biological diversity systems, and we have established research centres to develop genetic strains of flora and fauna adapted to our harsh environmental conditions. We have also made pioneering advances in the area of the conservation of our coastal areas, the development of the industrial sector, the promotion of the marine environment and the conservation of our fish stocks. We have enacted many laws and regulations that will ensure the conservation of these vital areas despite the damaging effects on the marine environment of heavy marine traffic in our territorial waters.

The United Arab Emirates has pursued a policy of coordination and cooperation at the bilateral, regional and international levels in the area of environment and development, including the exchange of information and expertise and the holding of conferences, seminars and competitions on research programmes. We recently announced the holding of an international contest to design a practical model for human settlements, and we have declared 24 November of each year to be Environment Day. Convinced of our shared international responsibility, we signed the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992 and acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December 1995. In addition, we are considering acceding to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification once all legislative procedures have been dealt with.

Political events worldwide have shown that war, national and regional conflicts, occupation, the imposition of *fait accompli* policies and the denial of the legitimate rights of peoples under occupation have an adverse impact not only on peace and security in a region but on economic, social and environmental development. The Arabian Gulf, whose proven oil reserves make it one of the most strategic regions in the world in terms of economy, trade and finance, continues to this day to suffer serious environmental damage as a result of the residues emanating from the vessels that travel through Gulf waters and of the wars and conflicts of the past two decades.

All of these wars and conflicts have had a serious impact on the population and on natural resources, especially on our region's fish stocks and flora and fauna. We believe that the responsibility for conservation of the environment in that region is a common responsibility that should be shared at the national, regional and international levels.

In the same vein, we would like to reiterate that it is very important to resolve disputes by peaceful means and negotiation, in keeping with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

In the Middle East, the Palestinian people and the Arab population in the Syrian Golan, southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley continue to face serious environmental dangers as a result of the continued Israeli occupation of their territories and the growing military threat posed by nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons. Environmental conservation in our region requires as a foundation lasting peace, which cannot be achieved as long as the Israeli Government does not fulfil its bilateral and international obligations under international law and the Rio principles, in particular chapters 23, 14 and 8 of Agenda 21.

In closing, let me add that in order for the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development fully to be implemented, unswerving political will is required. Only then can we improve human behaviour worldwide and thereby fulfil our aspirations in the area of environment and sustainable development.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates for his statement.

Mr. Mohammad Samhan, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Muhamed Sacirbey, Chairman of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Muhamed Sacirbey, Chairman of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sacirbey (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Let me do one thing that I think most of us have been hoping to do for some time. Wearing this little tag, I feel as if I am in quarantine; so if no one minds, I will take it off while I make my presentation.

The people of all the nations represented in the Assembly — big or small, north or south, east or west — are inextricably tied together by the environment that we all share. Political borders, ideologies and economic systems cannot serve as effective environmental lines of demarcation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country, handicapped by the consequences of war. Our contribution to this effort is further constrained by our circumstances, and we will not compensate by attempting to deliver a lengthy, all-encompassing lecture. Leaders, officials and experts from around the globe have already more than adequately spoken of the objectives that we all share and of the necessary steps that should and must be pursued. However, our current circumstances and unfortunate recent history allow us to contribute to the current dialogue from a rather unique perspective.

The initial environmental consequences of widespread war, especially the targeting of the civilian population and its means of livelihood in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ironically produced contradictory indications in terms of environmental issues. On the one hand, environmental treasures, as well as civilians, cultural monuments, and industry were targeted and severely damaged. Landmines, spent and live ammunition, and improvised trenches and dirt roads litter our country. Forests and other natural resources were crudely exploited by those who showed no appreciation for nature or for human life. In addition, environmental protection mechanisms were destroyed or disregarded.

On the other hand, because civilians were so comprehensively targeted, including everything from industry to heating, electricity, gas and sanitation facilities, the level of waste from human and industrial activity dramatically decreased. While people suffered without heat through the cold, air quality was actually enhanced. Factories were damaged and remain inactive, but rivers and lakes saw a rejuvenation in aquatic life. Fish reappeared in areas from which they had been absent for years.

Unfortunately, the early indications for the future environmental well-being of the country and the region are much more challenging. Real and lasting peace demands that landmines and war residue be removed, but also that citizens be provided with the opportunity to rebuild their economic lives and, of course, their industries. The pressure for jobs and production is high, especially for a country that has already once passed the phase of a developing nation and where economic philosophy must overcome hateful nationalist ideology and undemocratic tendencies. We will seek to do our part. We have significant human resources, expertise and experience to contribute. Nonetheless, our dependence on multilateral and bilateral assistance is determinative for our future.

Our friends, those with a direct interest in peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, can take advantage of the opportunity for a new beginning, of a rejuvenated environment, and of a well-educated and technically sophisticated population to benefit all the people, the peace and nature. Or, to the contrary, those foreign factors with the capability to influence can seek to leave us once again susceptible to environmentally damaging exploitation.

There does not have to be a diametric choice between environment and economics, between people and nature. Unfortunately, there are already disturbing indications. Perceiving our desperation and urgency, some have been inclined to export to us old and even obsolete technology and exploitative economic activity.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to choose its options wisely, and we will direct our meagre resources and our efforts accordingly. We give tremendous priority to the well-being of our environment. At the same time, we believe that we have multilateral and bilateral friends who value the economic and natural potential of our country and the strategic benefits of peace. Our people have suffered tremendously from the war, but now Bosnians and their environment, and all of us, can at least recoup some of the potential benefits incidentally arising out of war-imposed deprivation.

We in Bosnia and Herzegovina are well aware of our global environmental obligations and shudder at the thought that one small country like Bosnia, in its efforts to rebuild and to restart industry, may be put at odds with its own environment and contribute negatively to the plight of others, in particular small countries such as the island States. Having faced extinction, we can well comprehend the threat to existence faced by these small States.

The lessons of Bosnia and Herzegovina are valid for all, as well as specifically for other States recovering from war and those hungry for peace. Properly addressed, the newly attained peace can be translated into new economic and environmental opportunities and international cooperation towards the goals of clean air, clean water and reforestation. To the contrary, if shortsighted strategies and options are forced upon us, it can mean an ever-deteriorating situation combining the consequences of war, pollution and unconscionable industrial exploitation: the conspiracy of landmines and industrial waste overwhelming the land, the people, the fragile peace and our common Earth. The former option benefits all of us. The latter option would ultimately negatively affect all of us.

The beginning is also our conclusion. We are inevitably intertwined through our one common home.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I thank the Chairman of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for his statement.

Mr. Muhamed Sacirbey, Chairman of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Samir Moubarak, Chairman of the Delegation of Lebanon.

Mr. Samir Moubarak, Chairman of the Delegation of Lebanon, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from French*): I wish at the outset to express our profound grief at the death of Mr. Jacques-Yves Cousteau who, throughout his scientific career, worked to protect the ocean environment. The international community has lost a great champion of the environment. My delegation conveys to the delegation of France its deepest sympathy.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

While the international community was launching Agenda 21 at Rio and laying the groundwork for the debate on sustainable development, Lebanon was rising from the ashes of a destructive war that had lasted 20 years, had claimed the lives of more than 150,000 of its citizens and had left tens of thousands of others injured, maimed or permanently disabled. That war also destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure, damaged hundreds of thousands of housing units, displaced a third of our population and forced another third, mostly skilled labourers and technicians, to emigrate.

A further price was serious degradation of our ecological systems and the human environment. Waste piled up, sewage systems failed, most mountainous lands became barren as the platforms that were erected to prevent landslides broke down, and forests, which had covered 30 per cent of the country, dwindled to less than 3 per cent. In addition, the social welfare, health and educational systems fell to their lowest levels ever.

Consequently, after this long conflict, Lebanon had to build for peace. There is no doubt that Lebanon has benefitted from the new vision for the protection of the environment and the ecosystem and for sustainable development. Yet even armed with this, there were further challenges that we had to meet: strengthening peace within the nation and reconstructing and rehabilitating all that had been destroyed or damaged, while at the same time laying the groundwork for putting in place the conditions adopted by the international community for sustainable development. We are encountering many complexities in these conditions, and these require radical organizational and institutional restructuring, vast resources and the relevant modern technologies and specialized technical know-how. In the absence of any special fund to support it, Lebanon has had to rely on its own capabilities and to prove its worthiness and eligibility to attract resources and investment — all this while parts of the South and of the Beqa'a valley remain under Israeli occupation and while the Israeli war machine continues to pose a constant threat, preventing large segments of our population from pursuing their normal economic and agricultural activities.

In the five years since the Rio Convention, the Lebanese Government has been able to restore normalcy throughout the country. It has also put in place an ambitious plan for reconstruction and rehabilitation, entitled "Prospects 2000", and has been able, in record time, to persuade local, regional and international investors to participate in implementing the programmes of that plan.

Thus, having enjoyed the support of the fraternal Arab States and of a number of friendly countries, and in full cooperation with the executing agencies of the United Nations, international financial institutions and donor countries, Lebanon embarked on the process of implementing the commitments of Rio and made the protection and rehabilitation of the environment in its various aspects an integral part of its works programmes.

We also hastened to accede to the international instruments concluded for that purpose, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and to include their provisions in our national legislation. Also, inasmuch as our capabilities and conditions have allowed, we have sought to respond to the requirements of international cooperation and to engage faithfully in the common international effort to protect our common future.

During this period, Lebanon has also participated in the conferences held under United Nations auspices and — in cooperation between the Government, the private sector and grassroots organizations — has established national committees to translate the programmes of action developed by those conferences into national programmes.

One example of the Government's work to date is the creation of a Ministry for the Environment as the focal point for the implementation of sectoral environmental plans and for the coordination of national efforts aimed at integrating environmental considerations into the overall economic plans. Plans are also under way to establish a national committee for sustainable development. Environmental rehabilitation programmes have also been developed at a cost of approximately $600 million for the purpose of building, repairing or operating plants for refining sewage water, recycling solid and liquid wastes and cleaning up Lebanon's territorial waters and coast. The Ministry has also cooperated with the industrial sector in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, in accordance with the provisions of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol.

The Government has also created the Ministry of Administrative Reform for the purpose of rehabilitating and strengthening the administrative system, in accordance with the requirements of the new phase of development and to ensure the sustainability of the approved development plans. In this context, the Central Laboratory, the National Council for Scientific Research and the units and organs of the various departments for quality control in food and trade have all been rehabilitated.

A plan has been established for the reforestation of Lebanon, under which thousands of forest trees have been planted in various parts of the country. Three nature reserves have been established and three more planned in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. Also established have been the National Bank for Agricultural Development and the National Fund for Natural Disaster Insurance. Wildlife hunting has also been regulated. Development projects have been implemented in the marginalized and disadvantaged agricultural areas of Lebanon, particularly the Baalbek-Hermel Project for Integrated Rural Development and Alternative Agriculture.

Human-resource development, the eradication of poverty and social development remain high on the Government's list of priorities. In this respect, many internally displaced persons have been returned to their homes; their deserted villages are being rebuilt and infrastructure and economic institutions rehabilitated to enable them to resume their normal lives.

A new educational structure has been adopted, scores of schools throughout Lebanon have been repaired and restored, and environmental awareness and primary health-care programmes introduced in the educational curricula. Health centres in outlying areas have been repaired and restored.

A national committee for women has been created and the necessary legislation to enable women to participate fully in all political, economic and social fields at the national level introduced.

The economic path followed since the end of the war in Lebanon has depended on the promotion of the physical infrastructure as an essential factor to attract investments that, in turn, invigorate the economy, create new job opportunities and lead to greater productivity.

We have had no real problems in adjusting to the institutional and conceptual requirements of the new international economic order. Our open and free economy is inherited and the private sector is completely dynamic. We have had problems, however, in facing the practical elements of the challenges created by the globalization of the economy and the need to secure the necessary competitiveness at the regional and international levels.

In this context, Lebanon agrees with the position of the Group of 77 and China regarding the institutional frameworks and international cooperation required for reaching a just partnership that will allow the sustainable development of all developing countries. This in turn, will be mutually beneficial to all members of the international community, particularly in protecting the global environment. The commitment of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of rich nations to official development assistance to developing States remains essential.

The time limit prevents us from detailing the continuous achievements and challenges facing Lebanon. The Lebanese delegation has provided a detailed study in this respect, undertaken in cooperation with the competent departments and the relevant international organizations, copies of which are available to interested delegations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon for his statement.

Mr. Samir Moubarak, Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ravan Farhâdi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan.

Mr. Ravan Farhâdi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): The Rio Summit promoted global awareness of the problems of environment and development. We hope that the international community, in securing a genuine partnership, will live up to its commitments to introduce immediate measures for the full implementation of Agenda 21.

Today, we all agree that the plan of action adopted five years ago in Rio has lost nothing of its urgency. To begin with, it is quite clear that sustainable development cannot be achieved throughout the world by the turn of century if a good part of the world's population lacks the most basic life necessities, such as safe drinking water. It is also understood that global sustainability will remain mere wishful thinking so long as the rich industrialized countries continue to undermine the ecological life-support system of the human family by wasting resources.

On the other hand, the developing, non-industrialized countries face increasing challenges in working on their environmental-protection issues. These issues, however, in addition to the battle against poverty for the least developed countries — especially those finding themselves in an ever more desperate situation, due in part to the fact that they have been devastated by continuous warfare — must win high priority in the allocation of additional and immediate assistance.

Afghanistan is neither a tropical country nor a land covered by natural green pastures. Green areas in Afghanistan are only those cultivated by farmers and the orchards. In 1979, when Afghanistan was invaded by the Red Army, the country had a very sophisticated environmental study in the works, with the technical assistance of France, called *Tapis Vegetal*, with geographical maps at a 1/50,000 scale. That study, available in the archives of the French Government, is still highly useful for the study of the environmental landscape of the country.

Afghanistan is a country which is ravaged by more than 10 million landmines. The heavy toll constantly taken on farmers and their children — the future generation of farmers — by landmines is depriving the country of those individuals who would revitalize green areas. Anti-personnel landmines in Afghanistan are a colossal factor in the degradation of the environment. The green areas exist only because of farming and orchard planting. The more dangerous it becomes for the farmers and the shepherds to walk on landmine-infested areas, the more the green areas will be transformed into arid land. Agriculture, which is the most important factor of environmental protection in Afghanistan, will never be promoted until the mine-clearance programmes are effectively implemented.

Let me also draw the Assembly's attention to paragraph 21 of Chapter I of the Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on preparations for the convening of this extraordinary special session. Its subparagraph (e) concerns the disproportionate impact of poverty on women, stating that can be addressed in particular by removing the barriers to women's equal access to productive resources and services. In Afghanistan, in the towns invaded by the Taliban mercenaries, actions contrary to these important precepts have taken place and are taking place, as witnessed by non-governmental organizations. Women, many of whom are destitute widows and have to feed their children, have been cruelly deprived from their right to work.

I invite those studying about Afghanistan to read the report the Human Rights Special Rapporteur, Dr. Choong Hyun Paik, presented to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on 20 February 1997, about the mass violation of women's rights committed by the Taliban, including the beating of 225 women and the chain-lashing of many of them. I also refer to the Security Council debate on Afghanistan of 14 April 1997.

Because of the diversity of the climate in Afghanistan, a country which is a rendezvous of three Asian regions — the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia — the problems related to the protection of the environment are also very diverse. The cold winter climate of the mountainous region, the largest part of the country, causes the crucial fuel problem during the cold season. The situation in Afghanistan in this regard is worse than the sub-tropical lands of our Asia. Conditions in Afghanistan in this regard are very different from those in the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent.

The conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests are a crucial factor in economic and social development all over the world. Afghanistan has small mountain forest areas in the southeast, in Paktia and Kunar. In both places, deforestation is advancing, in the case of Paktia with alarming speed.

While in neighbouring Pakistan some measures have been taken against the deforestation of mountain forests, encouragement is given, on the contrary, to those on both sides of the border to promote the trade of forest wood cut from Afghanistan and transported to Pakistan. No limitation of any kind is recommended to or observed by a group of greedy local chieftains with regard to cutting the mountain forest trees in Afghanistan and transporting them to Pakistani towns where they are used for the construction of houses. Connivance between officialdom and wood smugglers is a well-known fact in the area.

Let us remember that before 1979, Afghanistan was receiving German technical assistance for the conservation of the Paktia region mountain forests. This and all western assistance to Afghanistan was interrupted after the occupation.

Regarding environmental degradation, let me quote a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report:

> "Unavailability or unaffordability of alternative sources of energy in rural areas (such as coal, fuel, oil and kerosene) have left people heavily dependent of fuel-wood for their basic energy needs. Over-exploitation of fuel-wood resources has led to extensive deforestation, severe soil erosion and loss of productive agricultural land."

The war in Afghanistan, as has been well known to the United Nations since the Red Army invaded our country in 1979, caused the destruction of basic rural infrastructure such as the traditional irrigation system. It is unfortunate that because of an armed conflict directly imposed by foreign intervention and the aggression that still ravages the Afghan economy, nothing has been done to implement the UNDP views for the rehabilitation project in this field.

In many parts of the country, the forced displacement of the population as a result of armed conflict and the crowding of civilian refugees in rural areas has created many troublesome hardships, including the lack of safe water. The continuation of war in Afghanistan has worsened the situation in the country. In addition to the killings and forced exodus by the Taliban of entire rural and semi-rural populations in some areas, it has also caused a dramatic disruption of the ecosystem and of current agricultural seasonal work.

The role of the relevant organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, of non-governmental organizations and of donor countries is crucial in protecting the environment in a country like Afghanistan. UNDP, in cooperation with other organizations, should continue to strengthen its contribution to programmes for sustainable development, the protection of the environment and the eradication of poverty.

Let me present a proposal to the United Nations at the end of this brief statement. War-stricken countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are suffering from a set of crucial hardships. In addition to landmines, many other socio-economic difficulties resulting from long armed conflicts are shared by these countries. It is high time to make a special study of all these least developed countries that are also war-stricken and of their problems of rehabilitation, reconstruction and protection of the environment.

In conclusion, let me remind you that for Muslims, who constitute almost one fifth of the world's population, the respect for and protection of the environment, which is a blessed gift of God, is a subject of faith in accordance with Koranic precepts. Other religions also dispense similar teachings. We can say that respect for the environment is a sacred duty of all individuals of the world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan for his statement.

Mr. Ravan Farhadi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting Chairman (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sorour (Inter-Parliamentary Union): The decisions taken by Governments in Rio are at the heart of the concerns of the worldwide parliamentary community, and I speak today on behalf of that community. During the past five years, Members of Parliament throughout the world have come to debate the consequences of those decisions and to consider how they can best be implemented while remaining attuned to the concerns of the populations they represent. They have an important role to play and a hard task to perform. Their role is important, since their active participation is indispensable if the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) are to become a reality.

Here, I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the overall evaluation of parliamentary action to implement Agenda 21 which was recently adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and which is available to the Assembly in the addendum to document A/S-19/15. Their task is a difficult one since, on account of the worsening of the situation at the world level, the economic crisis and unemployment in the North, poverty and catastrophes of all kinds in the South, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Governments and citizens to keep commitments which impose heavy short-term sacrifices and whose benefits will be felt only in the long term.

It is no secret that ecological choices seem more popular in periods of sustained growth than during a crisis or recession. However, this very worsening of the situation is justification for the implementation of the Rio programme. We all know that an ecological crisis not only leads to the deterioration of the environment, it is itself a factor in economic decline and social destabilization. There are more and more countries where food is scarce and where the depletion of the natural commons is leading to a decline in production, the loss of jobs and a fall in exports. Insecurity and poverty are becoming generalized, including in the countries described as rich.

How can the imperatives of environmental protection and economic development be reconciled? There is an answer to this dilemma. The tremendous input made by UNCED to thinking on the interdependence of problems of environment and development has in fact led to the identification of technical solutions. The measure of resolute action for sustainable development is therefore essentially of a political nature.

Overcoming these obstacles calls for the mobilization of all actors in society and, first and foremost, their representatives — Members of Parliament. Indeed, it is they who give political legitimacy to government action. It is they who ensure that such action receives popular support, and it is they who have the task of seeing to it that the commitments reached in Rio are respected. Since they bear this capital responsibility, it is, to them, above all, that present and future generations will attribute the successes or failures of sustainable development.

In order for parliamentary action to be effective, Parliaments and their members must themselves be convinced of the need to give preference to the long-term interests of society and to call into question the dominant model of development. It is thus essential that they be associated with the work of the international community and that the concerns inherent in their function be duly taken into consideration.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union therefore welcomes the strengthening of its links with the United Nations, as demonstrated by my presence here today. It expresses a wish that Parliaments and their members throughout the world could thus work alongside other governing bodies to bring their contribution to international debates as they do to national debates.

Allow me to take this opportunity to stress the absolute importance of renewed vigour in the worldwide partnership for sustainable development. Only international solidarity will enable us to build a safer world, a world that is more just and more free, both for today and tomorrow. But let us not deceive ourselves. It is largely the failure to embrace the cause of solidarity that is preventing the success of the programme established by UNCED. Unfortunately — and I repeat, unfortunately — the persistent reluctance of the countries of the North to respect their commitments to the developing countries by granting additional financial resources, increasing public development aid to 0.7 per cent of their gross national product and transferring eco-technologies under favourable conditions, is considerably restricting the capacity of these countries to meet the requirements of sustainable development. Solidarity must also lead to a solution of problems such as the debts of developing countries, particularly for the poorest of them.

Of course, financial input alone will not suffice. It must go hand in hand with a worldwide policy designed to establish the concept of sustainable development firmly in the minds and behaviour patterns of citizens. In this spirit, it is necessary to redefine the established priorities in the management and planning of limited resources.

In conclusion, I would like, on behalf of all the world's Members of Parliament, to urge Governments and multilateral cooperation institutions to give a solemn undertaking to honour all the Rio commitments, to show greater determination in their respect for them, to reinforce the actions so far undertaken and, to that end, to set precise goals with specific time-frames.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union for his statement.

Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Mr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. N'Dow (Centre for Human Settlements): It is an honour and a privilege to be able to participate in this review of the implementation of the outcome of that most historic of United Nations conferences, the Earth Summit.

The promise of the Earth Summit to bring about a sustainable human future will be fully realized only when the challenge of providing improved shelter, housing and management of human settlements, particularly in the world's urban centres and mega-cities, is addressed.

This is the important connection between the Earth Summit and the Istanbul Conference, the City Summit, which took place exactly a year ago in Istanbul. The objective of the Istanbul Summit was to raise global awareness for the sake of an urgent improvement in the living conditions of more than 1.5 billion people the world over, people who are today inadequately housed or simply just homeless. The Istanbul Conference further focused global attention on the importance of the need for vigorous action to address the management of these cities, this new habitat of mankind, this explosion that is taking place in nations large and small. We are all rushing headlong into an urban twenty-first century. The century of the city has truly arrived, and in most cases we are unprepared for this new century.

These challenges — shelter and housing and the need to address urbanization — both impact disproportionately and very severely on hundreds of millions of poor and disadvantaged people in nations large and small — people who, mostly but not in all cases, live in the developing countries of our world; people who are huddled in vast urban slums or in rural shacks; people who lack not just secure work, but also such basic necessities as clean water, sanitation, waste disposal, safe transportation and even the most minimal green spaces to call their own.

Today in these Halls, most of us speak of impending disaster, impending ecological doom. We speak of the slow and agonizing death of our planet unless urgent action is taken everywhere. But there is another reality out there. It is that, for the world's poor, these teeming millions who are huddled in their shacks looking for work that does not exist, this agony that we describe, that we foretell here today, has already begun. This is why, when the global action plan of Istanbul, the Habitat Agenda, was drawn up, an agreement was reached with great difficulty and contention — yet successfully — that there must be instituted a right to housing whose progressive and full realization must be the concern of every nation.

Why cities and why the urban centres? It is in the world's cities today that the majority of our planet's population is going to be living. This urbanization of our world is driven by unprecedented growth in developing countries. It is also coinciding with the decay of the countryside in most parts of the world. In just 30 years from now, urban populations will be the highest they have ever been in our human history.

But why are these cities still more important for sustaining our human future? First of all, today, on the positive side, cities are centres of the flowering of the human intellect, of discovery, of the arts, of science, of intellectual ferment. But today also, it is important that we do not forget that it is in the cities that most of the world's food is being consumed; that most of the world's fibre is being used; that most of the world's resources — mineral, water and otherwise — are being used; that the most pollution is being generated; that the most waste is being produced.

But it is also in these cities that most social dislocation is taking place: the disasters, the catastrophes of a social kind — drugs, violence; that the risk of political strife is highest; and, importantly, that national wealth and national economies are focused and the very expression of globalization and a globalized economy are taking place. Indeed, it is in these urban centres of our world that the sustainability battle may be won or may be lost.

It stands to reason, therefore, that when it comes to the protection of our biosphere; when it comes to preserving the global commons; the protection of the freshwater resources of our planet; the protection of our coastal areas; the consumption and conservation of natural resources; the protection of human health; the generation of wealth; the role of urban centres, cities, this new human habitat, must be addressed and must be at the centre of our international concern.

Although problems may be defined as global, there must be local solutions. This is why the General Assembly, in its resolution 51/181 of 16 December 1996, called for the holding of this special session. As it did so, it emphasized and recommended that this session give due attention to the issue of human settlements in the context of global, sustainable human development.

This focus on sustainable human development and on enabling and facilitating local attention is the approach that we take in HABITAT, we who have been designated as task managers for those chapters of Agenda 21 that deal with human settlements. These tasks are contained in the report of the implementation of Agenda 21 forwarded to this special session by the Commission on Human Settlements.

Over the five years since UNCED, four priorities areas have emerged in the field of human settlements. I recommend them strongly to representatives. They all relate to the implementation of Agenda 21.

First, a philosophy of "shelter for all" must now drive policy-making in nations large and small — a policy that will improve the immediate environment of people, that will alleviate poverty, that will bring about social justice. Poverty manifests itself primarily in inequalities in living conditions, differences between neighbourhoods, social strife and dislocation that will ultimately lead to great difficulties at the national level.

Secondly, improved environmental infrastructure and services must, again, be the driving force in our planning. We must enhance environmental infrastructure, we must provide the services and we must reduce pollution.

Thirdly, it is recommended that we all devote more attention to managing cities better — big cities, medium-sized cities — and increase the local capacity for managing them for sustainable development.

Fourthly, we must instil a gender-sensitive strategy, plans that include the concern of participation of half of our population, the womenfolk, to promote consensus on priorities and to make sure that we, men and women, pool our intellectual and other resources to reach our common objectives together.

But how far have we come? Today, five years after Rio and one year after Istanbul, strategies have been reformulated for shelter in 80 countries, I am glad to report. These strategies have been formulated along enabling principles and we are satisfied with the pace of implementation as it is evolving. There has been remarkable improvement in urban management, which has become a priority for many Governments today. It has also become a priority for international action, including the international lending institutions.

The inclusion of communities, of civil society, in partnership for the improvement of services and infrastructure is critical, because today we have come to a stage of our human journey where it is no longer possible for Governments alone to have the vision and the resources to overcome all the challenges we face for human development.

We are pleased to inform this Assembly that local plans of action for sustainable development have proliferated since Rio. Today, 1,800 local Agenda 21s have been formulated and are being implemented and 130 countries have drawn up national plans of action for human-settlements development as part of the Istanbul process.

We have to ask ourselves two basic questions: By what strategies must we now follow up on this human-settlements dimension of sustainable development? What will be the concepts that will animate our action?

First of all, the acceptance of the principle of enablement in partnership: networking and the exchange of best practices has worked. Secondly, it is important that there be international action, international cooperation, new resources and additional resources to support action at the global level. These are the main commitments through which action has been taken.

In Istanbul in June 1996, the global community reconfirmed to the Habitat Agenda its commitment to Agenda 21. One year later, our Commission on Human Settlements has pushed these frontiers even further, finding a normative role for itself in the implementation of the Agenda and calling for a revitalized and strengthened United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Finally, it is no exaggeration to state here that our task — yours and ours in the United Nations — of attempting to meet the sustainable development challenge will be complete only when we answer two very fundamental questions: How is mankind going to live in the twenty-first century? And where will mankind be living in the twenty-first century? These questions are crucial because the combination of poor human settlements and poverty will destroy nations. It has already started doing so in many parts of the developing world.

As we have seen from the testimony given from this rostrum, especially by countries ravaged by wars and civil strife, the underlying factors are often related to non-functioning human settlements — a struggle for human settlements, a struggle over whose land, whose water, whose village, whose city.

These are very important issues, because unless they are resolved, we will not be able to fulfil our quest for sustainable development, which has become — it must be realized — the most relevant disarmament philosophy for the international community. Sustainable human development through, among others things, human settlements is the new name for peace and security in the world, and it must be pursued with great vigour and vigilance.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Mr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility.

Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. El-Ashry (Global Environment Facility): It is a great honour to take part in this special session of the General Assembly dedicated to reviewing — and renewing — our collective commitment to sustainable development. Many constructive comments and diverse viewpoints have been voiced this week. But there is one thing on which we all agree: our five-year report card as stewards of earth's resources is not a stellar one. Still, I continue to be optimistic. By working together, we can keep the promises made in Rio and clear a path towards sustainable development.

The spirit of Rio remains strong, but it has not remained unchallenged. We have been productive at the margin but not decisive at the core — in Governments, international institutions and legislative assemblies.

Too often we have chosen to conduct business as usual, with results that range from steady increases in greenhouse gases to the widening gap between rich and poor. Just in these five years, we have added 450 million people, increased carbon emissions by 4 per cent and laid waste another 3.5 per cent of the world's tropical forests. Ecosystems which are critical to the functioning of earth's life-support systems continue to be undermined, and land degradation threatens food security and livelihoods, especially in Africa.

Another worrisome statistic underscores the stagnation, even the decline, of financial support from Governments for sustainable development. Official development assistance as a percentage of donor country gross national product is at 0.27 per cent — its lowest point in half a century.

On the positive side, foreign direct investment in developing countries has more than tripled since 1992; in 1996, it reached $285 billion. However, foreign direct investment is no panacea for sustainable development; 73 per cent goes to just 12 countries, and foreign direct investment has not yet been prominent in the environmental and social sectors. Civil society has become an important force in implementing Agenda 21 and in increasing public awareness of global sustainability, particularly at the local level.

There has also been the emergence of the restructured Global Environment Facility (GEF). At Rio, Governments called for the GEF to be restructured. In March 1994, an agreement was reached that responds fully to the provisions of Agenda 21. The restructured GEF ensures universality in membership, flexibility in operations, transparency and democracy in governance, and predictability in funding, as well as accessibility and non-conditionality.

The restructured Facility was also replenished with a $2-billion-dollar trust fund. Clearly, the GEF represents the first, and most significant, financial commitment arising from the Rio Summit. In the three years since its restructuring, the GEF, through its implementing agencies — the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank — is at work in more than 110 countries and has 161 participating nations. And, on an interim basis, it operates the financial mechanism for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Above all, the GEF is a financing instrument that also leverages and mobilizes private-sector resources and seeks co-financing opportunities with other bilateral and multilateral development institutions. The GEF has now authorized more than $1.6 billion in grants to recipient countries while leveraging more than $4 billion from other sources.

Our record in the short time since Rio is a strong one. But I am also a realist in recognizing that there is a great deal more to do, not only in addressing global environmental issues, but also in increasing the efficiency of our operations, our responsiveness and the dissemination of lessons and experience.

This is a very important year for the GEF. If we are to continue as the principal mechanism for the global environment, and to assist developing countries in fulfilling their commitments under the climate change and biodiversity Conventions and in the transfer of environmentally sound technology, particularly renewable energy, and promote partnerships for global sustainability, a successful replenishment of the GEF is absolutely essential. I am heartened by the strong statements of support made this week.

Today we have the opportunity — indeed the responsibility — not just to take stock and assess lessons, but also to address with renewed urgency the actions required to put our lifestyles, our consumption patterns, our population growth and our human settlements on a sustainable path.

This week, speakers highlighted a number of priorities, including fresh water, oceans, mega-cities, forests and desertification. These are all very important areas for concerted national and international action. But today I should like to single out one major priority, with all its profound and encompassing ramifications — not just on the areas of concern I mentioned earlier but also on the health, livelihood and economic well-being of people everywhere. This is a priority that will in a few months test our political will and resolve to move from rhetoric to action. I am speaking of the issue of climate change, and of the need for effective and binding targets, within a reasonable time-frame, for reducing greenhouse gases and for the pursuit of sustainable energy development.

There is clear consensus that we are modifying our atmosphere in an unprecedented way by the carbon emissions we are pumping out. Yes, there are some scientific uncertainties on the degree and distribution of regional impacts. But the time to act on climate change is not when all uncertainties are removed and the links are proved beyond a doubt; we must act when the possibility cannot be discounted. This is exactly the approach we in the international community have taken in the past to deal with priority environmental concerns such as air pollution, acid rain, toxic chemicals and in the banning of carcinogenic pesticides like DDT.

We also should not be confusing responsibilities. The biggest responsibility falls on those with the largest emissions. Solutions for such major global problems, however, need to be wide-ranging, cost-effective and based on the cooperation of all nations, without jeopardizing the right of the developing world to its own sustainable development. In this regard, incentives for facilitating the large-scale transfer to developing countries of energy-efficient and renewable-energy technologies can go a long way towards achieving both developmental and environmental objectives. The GEF stands ready to assist the international community in this endeavour.

The GEF, in a modest way, is already helping developing countries and economies in transition take the first steps towards addressing this problem. In a short time and with limited funds we are increasing the world-wide output of photovoltaic energy more than five-fold. And, with the World Bank and other partners, we are exploring the features of a large-scale programme on renewable energy. However, we will not collectively have a global impact on climate change unless industrialized and industrializing countries do what they must to reduce their emissions. It is not too late to reach an equitable and effective agreement at Kyoto if we marshal the political will and resolve to take the necessary steps now. We should no longer gamble with the future of our grandchildren and their children.

Agenda 21 opens with this hopeful observation:

> "integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to

> the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can — in a global partnership for sustainable development". *(A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), annex II, para. 1.1)*

The Global Environment Facility has been privileged to help implement its part of this partnership on behalf of the people of the world. And we will continue to do so in the interest of sustainable development and of future generations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, for his statement.

> *Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, was escorted from the rostrum.*

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is Mr. Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network, speaking on behalf of the Non-Governmental Organizations' Major Group.

> *Mr. Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network, was escorted to the rostrum.*

Mr. Khor (Third World Network): On behalf of the community of non-governmental organizations, I wish to thank the President and the members of the General Assembly for giving us the opportunity and the honour to address the Assembly and to participate in the working groups of this very important special session.

Five years ago the Earth Summit was a source of hope for a new global partnership. Today, the world's citizens are alarmed that we are rushing even nearer to the brink of ecological disaster. We are also deeply disappointed that the spirit of Rio seems to have somewhat vanished. Aid has fallen. Financial resources continue to be sucked out of developing countries through debt servicing and declining terms of trade. At the end of the 1980s for example, countries of sub-Saharan Africa were losing 15 per cent of their gross national product because of the fall in their terms of trade. Overall, today, $300 billion to $500 billion flows from the South to the North every year, creating a huge financial vacuum that the small volume of aid is unable to offset fully.

Instead of the technology transfer that was promised at Rio, the new intellectual property rights agreement in the World Trade Organization has created new barriers to the South's access to environmentally sound technology. That agreement also accelerates the practice of what we in the community of non-governmental organizations call bio-piracy, in which genetic resources and the knowledge of local communities are hijacked and transformed into patents and patented products that are a new source of enormous profit for the big corporations. The main victims are the poor communities and the ordinary people who endure the destruction of their environment and the indignities of poverty.

And yet today we stand and salute the hundreds and thousands of local community leaders and the millions of ordinary people around the world, who in the last five years have continued to provide us with the hope that something is being done to save the Earth.

We salute the indigenous peoples, who are desperately guarding the remainder of the world's rainforests and other ecosystems.

We salute the local communities and environmental activists, both of the North and of the South, who are fighting to save the remnants of their old-growth forests and who are bravely battling the toxic dumps and hazardous industries located in their neighbourhoods.

We salute the communities in every region of the world that have had to bravely defend their lands, homes and resources from the encroachment of commercial interests and from big billion-dollar projects that sometimes turn out to be economically unviable or ecologically destructive and that have created millions of environmental refugees.

We salute the thousands of farmers around the world who have suffered from the ill effects of chemical-based agriculture, who have switched to organic farming on their own, and who are rebuilding their soil and their land despite the lack of support from the agriculture establishment.

We salute the consumer movements that are fighting against unhealthy products and unsustainable consumption patterns, that campaign for breast-feeding instead of baby foods, that raise the alarm over the hazardous pesticides and pharmaceutical drugs that are dumped onto the third world, and that have taken the tobacco industry to court and forced it, in the United States at least, to admit its liability, to pay billions of dollars in compensation, and to agree to permit the Government to regulate their behaviour.

We salute the campaigners and the scientists who are exposing the darker side of genetic engineering, and who are waging a campaign against the patenting of life and the cloning of Nature's creation.

We salute the women who are in the forefront of the communities' fight for survival, hugging the trees to prevent their being chopped down, standing in front of the bulldozers, fighting against toxic industries and toxic dumps to prevent the poisoning of their children.

These brave, ordinary people, who are often the poorest and most humble of our societies, are the true practitioners and the real heroes of the sustainable development that the rest of us usually only talk about. They are in the forefront of the battle to defend their rights and to save not only their world but the world of all of us, on our behalf, always with hardship and bravery, and sometimes paying with their very lives. They are the ones who inspire us to believe that there is still hope for sustainable development.

We also salute the many non-governmental organizations in the fields of development and environment, the environmental journalists, the public servants in local authorities, the planners at the national level and the precious few political leaders and diplomats at the international level who in their own way have stuck out their necks on behalf of sustainable development. They include many who are present in this Hall and elsewhere in this building, who are going against the status quo and pioneering the way ahead.

We owe it to the public to do our part to challenge the old and unsustainable ways and patterns of production, technology, consumption and lifestyles.

The millions of battles waged at the local level are all linked to the growing power of globalization. The globalization prevailing today is inequitable, no doubt benefiting a few people but also marginalizing the many. It is based on the same consumption and production patterns that we have already proclaimed to be unsustainable. It represents the growing power of big business, which is increasing its monopoly of the economy.

In the five years after Rio, globalization is undermining the sustainable development agenda. Commerce and the need to be competitive have become the top priorities in many countries and the environment has been downgraded. In particular, the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements of 1994 seem to have overridden the 1992 Rio agreements of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). WTO is now institutionalizing globalization.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also concerned that the role of the United Nations is being steadily eroded and transferred to the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, which represent a different model of international cooperation. We therefore call on the political leaders to take control of globalization and to channel it towards sustainability.

In the next five years, the following 10 other actions are urgently needed. First, we must make the private sector more accountable. Second, we must make the world trading and financial systems more transparent and accountable to the public and to the goals of sustainable development. Third, we must greatly strengthen the resources and the role of the United Nations in ways that enable it to be true to its mission of serving the people. Fourth, we must create more opportunities for NGOs to participate in the United Nations and in policy-making and consultation at the national level. Fifth, we must integrate social, equity and environmental concerns in economic policy and development planning at the national and international levels. Sixth, we must rigorously assess new technologies for ecological, safety and social impacts. Seventh, we must quickly conclude effective treaties preventing the export of hazardous chemicals and other substances. Eighth, we must place top priority on the need to protect watersheds and hill regions in order to prevent further forest loss and to secure water supplies for the future. Ninth, we must take much more seriously the task of phasing out unsustainable agriculture and vigorously promoting sustainable agriculture. Tenth, we must have a new North-South dialogue and reforms in international economic relations, starting with the meeting of the Eight and the technology commitments of Rio, but moving on also to debt relief, fairer terms of trade and finance for developing countries.

We, the NGOs, realise that these tasks are very hard to achieve and that they can be done only if citizens themselves actively participate and campaign for them. In the next five years, the NGOs can be expected to pressure our policy-makers, politicians and diplomats to meet their commitments to sustainability. But the NGOs, citizen groups and social movements will also intensify the pressure on themselves to fight for people's rights, for the local and global environment and for the future of this Earth.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Director of the Third World Network for his statement.

Mr. Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. David Kerr of the International Chamber of Commerce, speaking on behalf of the Business and Industry Major Group.

Mr. David Kerr of the International Chamber of Commerce was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Kerr (International Chamber of Commerce): I thank the members for allowing me the opportunity of addressing this special session of the Assembly.

The 1992 Summit at Rio presented business with a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge to align its practices with sustainable development; an opportunity to take the lead in finding answers. Five years later, in 1997, we believe there is a good story to tell.

Member companies of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development have taken a lead in defining the issues to be addressed and in working together to develop answers and put them into practice. Much has been achieved. Much more has begun. And much remains ahead of us. After all, sustainable development cannot be achieved by one company, one business sector or one country alone. It must be a cooperative, collective effort involving learning by trial and error.

Governments are correctly withdrawing from areas where others, such as civil society and business, can and do perform required functions better. Business, through free trade, is spreading the technologies, skills and processes required for development and, given the right global frameworks, for more sustainable development.

However, despite these positive happenings, there is a tendency among Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media to call on business to do everything: to create wealth and jobs, clean up the environment, deliver development, satisfy all stakeholders, fight corruption, educate, provide health care and generally stabilize and improve society.

Obviously, business cannot do all of these things. However, business can contribute to the solution. The only requirement is that business be able to earn a profit. One thing is certain: A business that is not profitable over time ceases to exist and cannot contribute on any issues. So in this sense, competitiveness in the marketplace must be a first concern of any business.

It is for precisely this reason that the more far-sighted businesses are taking an interest in sustainable development. Several trends suggest that business is and will be paying increasingly more attention to the sustainable development agenda in order to remain competitive. No one trend taken alone is totally convincing. However, taken cumulatively, these trends make compelling reading for a thoughtful chief executive.

The trends include environmental regulations and enforcement getting tougher — in some countries chief executives face jail sentences for wilful pollution damage. Companies can save costs and boost profits by cutting waste and using natural resources more efficiently. Some Governments are encouraging self-regulation and pacts with Government agencies, rather than creating new environmental laws. Banks are taking a closer look at the environmental records of companies. They are concerned about their own legal liabilities and by borrowers not being able to repay loans if they face large pollution clean-up bills. The best and brightest people are more willing to work for environmentally responsible companies. The public is using its buying power to encourage business to fulfil environmental and social responsibilities. Increasingly, environmental groups and businesses are working together to find solutions. These trends, taken together, make a compelling case for business to pay attention to the sustainable development agenda.

The next step for advancement is answering the question: How can business travel along this positive route more quickly? One important approach is to keep improving the lines of communication among business, government and NGOs. Another is with the help of Governments. Governments are needed to create the conditions that will allow consistent and realistic goals to be developed and met — goals that are based on good science and the sound assessment of risk, and which balance ecological, economic and social objectives.

The conditions needed for business to make a greater contribution to sustainable development include the following: freer and more open markets — trade is the lifeblood of all economies, and open, prospering markets are a powerful force for creating equal opportunities for people; stable and predictable trade rules that help guarantee the conditions for freer and fairer competition in world markets; international standards of quality and environmental performance in order to avoid creating barriers to trade; realistic target-setting which recognizes the realities under which business operates; international frameworks to establish goals and to put in place the most effective solutions; policies to encourage the fast dissemination of technology to overcome many social and environmental problems; economic instruments that motivate and encourage actions that work towards the goals of sustainable development; and voluntary agreements to overcome inflexible and costly command and control policies.

In the five years since Rio, business has made great progress. However, we are still a very long way from achieving sustainable development, and further progress will require contributions from all sectors of society. Business is counting on Governments to play their part.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the representative of the International Chamber of Commerce for his statement.

Mr. David Kerr of the International Chamber of Commerce was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, on behalf of the Workers and Trade Unions' Major Group.

Mr. Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Jordan (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions): Since the origin of industrial society, working men and women have suffered some of the worst effects of unsustainable production. Since its birth, the trade-union movement has worked to attain sustainable development. Chapter 29 of Agenda 21 reflects our goals in this historic struggle.

Since 1992, through the Commission on Sustainable Development, we have said that trade unions must become a vital part of the global effort to implement Agenda 21. It is a grave indictment of the effectiveness of international cooperation — of us all — that so many of the commitments undertaken at Rio by the world's nations have not yet been realized and that the battle is being lost on so many fronts.

We believe that this illustrates the fallacy of thinking globally without acting locally. Too often the most vital points for real change, the world's workplaces, have been left out of the search for solutions. In over 2 million workplaces throughout the world, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) represents 124 million trade unionists from the national trade union centres of almost every country in the world, and all of them are workers who have a tremendous potential to stimulate change.

We know that trade unions, with Governments and employers, could mobilize workers in these workplaces to enable significant shifts away from unsustainable patterns of production. This, we believe, would have an enormous impact on all workplaces in every country and society. We have already demonstrated that the involvement of workers in workplace decision-making results in savings in terms of money, resources and waste. Yes, and it is we who can break down the barrier of fear caused by concern over job losses due to environmental transition.

Last year at the World Congress of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the largest gathering of trade-union leaders in the history of the world committed themselves to campaign for the involvement of workers and trade unions in sustainable-development decisions affecting the workplace. On behalf of those leaders, I want to communicate a clear message to this special session of the General Assembly: if you are serious about meeting the challenges that face mankind today, involve the trade-union movement.

We know that major change in patterns of production and consumption can be achieved if, and only if, workplaces are placed at the centre of the sustainable-development agenda; if trade unions are recognized for their strategic position and capacity to contribute to the search for solutions; if partnerships between employers, unions and Governments are promoted, including those negotiated as workplace agreements; if the International Labour Organization, through its labour standards and reporting mechanisms, is made central to implementation plans; if national reporting and monitoring systems are linked to workplace activities; if eco-management and workplace audit practices are made compulsory and include the involvement of workers and trade unions where they exist; and, finally, if where such measures are not possible, as in many developing countries, codes of conduct are utilized to integrate employment and social justice perspectives.

The trade-union movement recognizes climate change as the most potentially disruptive of all environmental concerns. We know that the drastic measures required to deal with it could have an unprecedented impact on workers, not only in the coal, oil, gas, forestry, transportation and fishing industries, but throughout the world of manufacturing and in many service industries as well. However, we also know that without equally dramatic action, the impact on workers and their families of massive climate change could be catastrophic.

We have already seen innumerable workers displaced by climate-based changes. In developing countries, working people are already having to bear the burden of underdevelopment with poverty and poor health. Any global climate policy must ensure the rights of these people to further economic development. In short, any response to climate change must be equitable if it is to enjoy global support. A massive education drive must explain to people why consumption patterns have to change drastically, in domestic life and in the workplace, and how this can be done.

The Workplace Eco-Audit, which we have been promoting since 1993, is getting the message through and bringing the workers and employers together to tackle a host of production problems, including the reduction of carbon-dioxide emissions. It provides a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress and feeding into the national reporting processes called for by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

One of our affiliates, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), has provided a concrete working model in its "TCO 6E" for integrating environmental policies as the basis for workplace eco-auditing. Large employers are already working with the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees. Here is the sort of action that a world weary of words wants.

Trade unionists represent the world's largest standing army, mobilized and motivated to spread knowledge, establish values, change attitudes and, above all, to harness commitment all to bring a positive change in the world of work for themselves and a more just and equitable society for their families. Please consider the potential of such army marshalled in the cause of sustainable development.

The world's trade union movement has demonstrated its ability to influence the course of history, from the industrial revolution to the defeat of apartheid. Please — and I repeat again, please — take up our strength and use it in your plans to shape a better world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions for his statement.

Mr. Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Godwin O. P. Obasi, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization.

Mr. Godwin O. P. Obasi, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Obasi (World Meteorological Organization): It is indeed a great honour to address this nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened to assess progress in the follow-up to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

The mandate of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) cuts across a significant number of key sectors that are vital to the sustainable development of all nations. As far back as 1976, the World Meteorological Organization issued the first authoritative statement on climate change, indicating the impact of the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This was followed by the convening of the first and second World Climate Conferences, the establishment by WMO and the United Nations Environment Programme of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1988 and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1990. We continue to co-sponsor several observing systems aimed at providing scientific information and improved climate predictions and assessments to aid Governments in their commitments on the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases under the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The WMO and its partner organizations also co-sponsored the Climate Agenda, which is designed to contribute to the future implementation and development of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Through the national meteorological and hydrological services of the world, the World Meteorological Organization continues to monitor ozone concentrations, the long-range transport of atmospheric pollutants, the acidity and toxicity of rain and atmospheric levels of aerosols. We are actively involved in the monitoring of the urban environment and in assisting the development of abatement policies. It was the World Meteorological Organization that issued the first warning on the depletion of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere in 1975 and its possible environmental and health implications. That statement was followed by an international plan of action and scientific assessments by the World Meteorological Organization and partners that provided the basis for the conclusion of the Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in Vienna in 1985, its Montreal Protocol and subsequent amendments. The resulting reduction in ozone-depleting substances in the atmosphere represents a major success for the international community in the implementation of Agenda 21.

In relation to the implementation of chapter 12, on combating desertification, the WMO cooperates with agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in promoting the application of agrometeorological methods to improve land use, crop selection and land-management practices. As recurrent drought promotes desertification, the WMO continues to give support to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and to institutions such as the WMO-established Joint Monitoring Centres in Nairobi and Harare.

Another important activity of the WMO is the implementation of chapter 17, on the protection of the oceans. The many relevant WMO programmes include extensive ocean monitoring and a Marine Pollution Emergency Response Support System offers these services.

The Comprehensive Assessment of Freshwater Resources of the World, which has been considered by this special session, is the result of a study undertaken by the WMO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other agencies, in response to a request by the Commission on Sustainable Development. The study confirmed that there is insufficient knowledge of exactly how much water is available, which poses difficulties for its effective, rational management. In this regard, the World Meteorological Organization, with the support of the World Bank, initiated the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System to assist the national Hydrological Services of the world in addressing these difficulties.

Under the Agenda 21 action plan for sustainable development, the WMO has placed great emphasis on capacity-building and the transfer of appropriate and affordable technology to developing countries, countries with economies in transition and, in particular, to small island developing States. Sustainable development is adversely affected by natural disasters. The WMO therefore continues to assist the national meteorological and hydrological services to improve early-warning systems to mitigate natural disasters caused by tropical cyclones, hurricanes, floods, droughts and other extreme weather events. In this regard, there have been significant and measurable successes in many parts of the world. For this reason, the implementation of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction activities beyond the end of the decade should continue and be intensified.

Let me conclude by noting that in the overall implementation of UNCED's Agenda 21, significant progress has been made in some areas and notably less in others. I am pleased to have outlined the principal WMO contributions directed towards implementation of Agenda 21. What can we, then, look forward to in the next five years, after this special session of the General Assembly?

First, there is the need for stronger commitments by all countries of the world to the various conventions aimed at the protection of the earth's atmosphere and environment.

Second, Governments must transform those commitments from words into deeds.

Third, greater support for the networks monitoring the atmosphere, the hydrological cycle, water resources and the oceans, as well as research into environmental and climate change, is imperative in order to improve our scientific understanding and advice to Governments and policy-makers for the enhancement of their mitigation efforts.

Fourth, continuing strong support for the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is important.

Fifth, Governments will need to develop policies and action plans which build on the findings of the Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World.

Sixth, mitigation efforts against natural disasters should continue to be given very high priority.

Seventh, improvements need to be made in the dispersal of funds to support environmental projects and in the transfer of technology to developing countries for capacity-building activities. In this regard, the involvement of the private sector should be further encouraged.

Finally, the World Meteorological Organization will continue to give very high priority to developing new initiatives to further the implementation of Agenda 21 and we look forward to increased cooperation within the United Nations systems and at the national, regional and international levels.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I thank the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization for his statement.

Mr. Godwin O.P. Obasi, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, was escorted from the rostrum.

Agenda item 3 *(continued)*

Credentials of representatives to the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-19/3 and Corr.1)

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We shall now proceed to consider the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 12 of its report (A/S-1/3 and Corr.1).

The Credentials Committee adopted this draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted. (resolution S-19/1).

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 3.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.

United Nations A/S-19/PV.10

General Assembly

Nineteenth Special Session

Official Records

10th plenary meeting
Friday, 27 June 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abou Demba Sow, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania.

Mr. Abou Demba Sow, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sow (Mauritania) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I convey to the General Assembly the best wishes of the President of the Republic of Mauritania for the success of this special session devoted to the important topic of sustainable development.

I congratulate Ambassador Razali on the effective manner in which he has been presiding over the work of the Assembly, and pay tribute to the Commission on Sustainable Development and its Chairman, Mr. Tolba, and to the United Nations Environment Programme. Our special thanks go to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the Secretariat staff for the excellent way in which they have organized this important international gathering.

Mankind will remember the end of the twentieth century as a time when a number of key issues were addressed, including the rational utilization of natural resources and the overall study of the relationship between man and the environment with a view to ensuring the rational, sustainable utilization of our resources. There is no doubt that the 1992 Rio summit was a major international meeting on environment and development. Now that five years have passed since Rio, it is important that we take stock of the progress we have made in implementing the outcomes of that conference.

Even if post-Rio activities have been oriented towards sustainable development and even if some of them have been successful, it is important that we acknowledge that in many poor countries the state of the environment has not improved; rather, it continues to deteriorate. Here, we have yet to conquer the improper utilization of natural resources and the persistence of poverty, which run counter to the criteria for sustainable development.

Mauritania's development problems are specific and include continued desertification, with its harmful effect on the population. This clearly testifies to the link that must exist between environment and development. Mauritania is fully aware of this reality and was an active participant in the preparations for the Rio summit; we have moreover done a great deal to implement its decisions. We have undertaken important measures under Agenda 21, despite the lack of available resources. Mauritania also participated in the preparatory work on

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

the Convention to Combat Desertification. We have endeavoured to adopt a long-term master plan to restore environmental balance with a view to achieving self-sufficiency in food for our people. We participate in the formulation and implementation of regional programmes for the Maghreb and the Sahel.

In the area of climate change, we are currently engaged in cooperative efforts with international organizations to prepare a study on climate change and its relationship to desertification in our country. In that context, the Mauritanian Government is implementing programmes related to new and renewable resources.

We have adopted a national strategy on biological diversity. In 1993, we reviewed the regulations for the Banc d'Arguin National Park, which figures on the World Heritage list compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. We have implemented a rational policy for the utilization of fishery and other sea resources.

Sustainable development is a universal phenomenon based on the relationship between environment strategies and development strategies. That is why we consider activities to combat illiteracy and social marginalization to be major pillars of sustainable development in Mauritania. We seek to involve the entire population in efforts to combat desertification, protect the environment and achieve an environment hospitable to life. That is why, thanks also to political stability, Mauritania has achieved a number of successes in its environmental policies.

Enrolment in schools has gone up, thanks to international investment, grassroots involvement in teacher training and the establishment of the necessary infrastructures.

In the social sector we have also made progress, particularly with regard to the supply of drinking water. Overall poverty has been reduced by 10 per cent.

The international community demonstrated solidarity at the Rio Summit in defining the challenges and dangers it faced. Obstacles still remain in the quest to implement Agenda 21. We have not been able to achieve an agreement over the last five years on financial machinery for the Convention to Combat Desertification. Over 1 billion people are affected by the phenomenon of desertification.

The implementation of Agenda 21 has not been up to the expectations of the developing world, particularly with regard to the transfer of technology.

We should like to appeal for efforts to improve living standards in developing countries so that desertification and pollution can be successfully combated and technology can be transferred under favourable terms. Negotiations must continue without delay in order to achieve concrete results, particularly in the struggle against desertification.

We also appeal for support for the financing of sustainable-development programmes. Developing countries must devote more resources to this cause, and developed countries must also do their part. In this context, the role of non-governmental organizations is extremely important.

In conclusion, I should like to express Mauritania's commitment to implementing the provisions of Agenda 21 in line with its available resources. In this context, we call for greater cooperation and consultation with the relevant international institutions.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania for his statement.

Mr. Abou Demba Sow, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paljor Dorji, Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan.

Mr. Paljor Dorji, Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Dorji (Bhutan): I have the honour to convey to the President of the General Assembly and through him to all representatives, the warm greetings of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan and good wishes for the success of this special session of the General Assembly.

I will be delivering an abridged version of my statement. The full statement will be circulated.

In Rio we all met and made commitments to future generations. The task before us is to assess our experiences with Agenda 21. We should not dwell on the ills of the global environment, but on the positive measures that we must take to address and confront the challenges ahead of us. Our objectives must be to demonstrate political will and global concern and to transform them into policies and projects at the operational level. Let us learn from each other's experiences, analyse the progress we have made and reaffirm our political commitments. We must leave this session with national obligations and specific policies, measures, projects and programmes to achieve our common goal of sustainable development. The global community must provide financial resources and environmentally sound technology transfer and adhere to the Rio principles of global partnership and common but differentiated responsibility.

My country, Bhutan, has made tremendous strides in the environmental field. We have devoted over 26 per cent of our total land area to an extensive protected-area system, reflecting the strong conservation policy and ethics of our people. Biodiversity conservation and preservation is a national policy of the Royal Government. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm the sovereign right of every State to its biological resources. We believe that the global community must ensure equitable sharing of intellectual property rights and other benefits arising out of the utilization of these resources.

We have also maintained over 72 per cent of the area of the country under forest cover, which serves as a very large carbon sink for the global community. An inventory of greenhouse-gas sources and sinks shows that Bhutan sequesters 19.6 tons of carbon per capita.

We are committed to working towards protecting our climate system. We urge all nations to accelerate negotiations on the text of a legally binding protocol or other legal instrument to be completed in time for the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto.

Although we face many challenges, the Royal Government has stated categorically that it will not resort to unlimited marketing of its natural resources, as such a policy will quickly undermine the country's tradition of conservation and place Bhutan in the same predicament as countries that face severe ecological and environmental problems. The Royal Government has chosen to forgo immediate economic gains and has placed higher priority on the conservation of natural resources and a programme of sustainable development.

We have also been building up global partnerships in the field of environment. One of the most innovative partnerships is the sustainable development agreement with the Governments of the Netherlands, Benin and Costa Rica. This agreement is based on the principle that sustainable development is a joint responsibility of both the North and the South. The Government of Denmark is also generously supporting the Environmental Sector Support Programme in Bhutan. This Programme will focus on environmental legislation, pollution control, hazardous waste and protected-area management. We also greatly appreciate the support for the environment provided by India, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Wildlife Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Asian Development Bank.

Bhutan is also working at the regional level with the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). In the Delhi Declaration, SAARC Environment Ministers reaffirmed that the environment is of common concern and made a commitment to regional cooperation in all spheres of environment and development.

Bhutan realizes that it is a small country and that its effort in the global environment may seem limited. However, we are fully committed to maintaining and preserving one of the last remaining bastions of pristine forests and rich biological diversity in the world for the benefit of all future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan for his statement.

Mr. Paljor Dorji, Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Robert Millette, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada.

Mr. Robert Millette, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Millette (Grenada): My Government is committed to the principles enshrined in Agenda 21, and efforts are being made at the national level to ensure that sustainable human and economic development is achieved.

Five years ago small island developing States participated in the Rio Summit. Most of the countries in our region, including my own, have fragile economies and face a constant threat to our marine, agricultural and forest ecosystems. Our vulnerabilities to the threat of hurricanes and the protection of the marine life upon which our economies thrive require active participation on our part and on the part of the international community to ensure the sustainability of our economies and the protection of our environment for future generations.

The Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994, received assurances that the international community would play a significant role in the process of ensuring that resources, both financial and technical, would be put in place to address issues relating to, among other things, poverty, climate change, natural and man-made hazards, the conservation and protection of our biological diversity and coastal zone management.

Since that Conference, however, the process has been slow. We urge the international community to make resources available to assist small island States, such as my own, in achieving the principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration.

In an effort to address the issue of poverty and poverty eradication, the Government of Grenada, with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-Agency Group of Development Organizations, the Government is holding a series of consultations in each parish, including Carriacou and Petite Martinique. The purpose of these consultations is to obtain first-hand information about the causes of poverty and to seek suggestions on what the Government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and communities can do to eradicate poverty. At the end of these consultations, a draft action plan for the eradication of poverty will be prepared and circulated.

The most dangerous agricultural pest, the pink mealy bug, is being controlled by bio-control agents — a hybrid beetle and a parasitic wasp. The results have been astoundingly positive. The mass participation of the population in that approach has contributed significantly to the rehabilitation of fruit production and a reinforcement of the benefits of bio-control approaches to combating agricultural pests, in contrast to the use of agrochemicals.

Deforestation and the degradation of grasslands are also being addressed. A deliberate policy of managing Grenada's forestry with a view to water and soil conservation is being pursued. Reafforestation and grassland management in Carriacou, under the Carriacou Forestry and Management Project, are testimony to that policy.

Through this project, the livelihood of livestock farmers will be enhanced through the rational development and management of grazing pastures. Also, the destruction of crops by stray animals will be minimized. The reafforestation component, in the long run, will improve the water situation in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. In Grenada, there is another forestry management project, funded by the British Development Division and the Government of Grenada.

The recently completed Land Information System Project, with modern geographic information-system technology, was funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and it provides Grenada with a scientific basis for the rational use of its agricultural lands. Currently, the Government is using some of the outputs of that project to better systematize its agricultural land-use policy.

My Government is committed to sustainable human development and, through that process, aims to integrate related policies into national development planning. In the area of tourism, for example, the Government and the private sector have undertaken such projects as the following: the cleaning of the beaches, the Anandale Welcome Centre, the Wobunn Conch Shell Project and the Mount Carmel Falls project, which is an excellent example of community involvement. It is an income-generating project which is linked to the protection of the environment and the conservation and protection of biological diversity. There is also the Sandy Island project in Carriacou, which is aimed at safeguarding the island from further coastal erosion and environmental degradation.

The Protection of Coral Reefs project, is a system of management by the local fishing community of a sufficiently large area, in collaboration with the Government. The Parks and Protected Areas project, an approach being taken between the tourism sector, to promote eco-tourism, and the Agricultural Ministry, is aimed at managing the forest's biodiversity.

In addition, my Government is committed to signing all the international conventions which will safeguard the Caribbean Sea as a pollution-free zone.

Within the last five years, four important international conferences have focused the attention of the international community on issues that are vital to the survival and development of the planet. Here I would like to mention the Earth Summit, held in Rio; the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island States, held in Barbados in 1994; the Summit on the alleviation of poverty which took place in Copenhagen 1995; and this present conference.

One of the aims of the Barbados Conference was to make the ideals of the Rio Conference a reality.

We have heard very promising statements from several Heads of Government from the developed as well as the developing world. It is our hope that this conference will lead to international cooperation, consensus-building and programmes that will result in the reduction of poverty, hunger, the spread of infectious diseases and better living conditions for everyone. But most importantly, the developing and developed countries must invest in programmes and projects aimed at achieving sustainable human development.

During the debate at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, the Prime Minister of Grenada said that the question of environment and sustainable development remains at the heart of our concerns. It is also a central issue for small island developing States in particular and developing countries in general.

If we continue to reaffirm that human beings are the centre of sustainable development and that they have a right to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature, actions must be taken at all levels, and especially at the international level, to facilitate the process, thereby ensuring that developing countries, and particularly small island developing States, are provided with the know-how and the resources to implement the programmes.

The vulnerability of small island States and the threat to our fragile ecosystems were recently demonstrated by the passage of hurricanes Iris, Luis and Marilyn. Our economic viability and sustainable development and growth are at stake. In this regard, Grenada looks forward to the fulfilment of the pledged commitments by developed countries to assist small developing countries in achieving sustainable human development.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Grenada for his statement.

Mr. Robert Millette, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean Ravou-Akii, Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu.

Mr. Jean Ravou-Akii, Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ravou-Akii (Vanuatu): It is a great honour for me to address this Assembly on this special session on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu.

(spoke in French)

On this important occasion, I wish, on behalf of the people and Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, to reaffirm the full support of the Republic of Vanuatu for the principles and objectives of Agenda 21, adopted as the outcome of the Rio 1992 Earth Summit. This wholehearted support is evident, on the one hand, in its participation in the gradual edification of the new branch of international law known as environmental law and, on the other, in its incorporation of environmental issues into its national education programmes.

Let us first consider the Republic of Vanuatu's participation in the gradual edification of the new branch of international law known as environmental law. The Republic of Vanuatu ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Moreover, it acceded to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its two amendments. All these international agreements have been integrated into the national laws of the Republic of Vanuatu on environmental protection. Such legislation is based on the provisions of article 7 of the 30 July 1980 Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.

One important element of our national legislation is a 1994 law on forest exploitation within the Republic of Vanuatu, the implementation of which effectively bans the export of timber. This ban was referred to in the book *The State of Food and Agriculture*, published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 1996.

Next, I turn to the incorporation of environmental issues into our national education programmes. In the third National Development Plan of the Republic of Vanuatu, covering the period 1992 to 1996, environmental issues are given pride of place in the national economy sectors, particularly in the training centres that educate future entrepreneurs, such as the Vanuatu National Institute of Technology, which is a bilingual institution.

The book *Sustainable Human Development in the Republic of Vanuatu*, published in 1996 by Direction: Asie-Pacifique with a preface by the United Nations Development Programme, bears witness to the priority which the Government of Vanuatu attaches to education, which it calls the cornerstone of the struggle against poverty.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu for his statement.

Mr. Jean Ravou-Akii, Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. David Orrukem, Chairman of the delegation of Palau.

Mr. David Orrukem, Chairman of the delegation of Palau, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Orrukem (Palau): It is a great pleasure to address the Assembly today. I want to express my profound gratitude for having been given this opportunity to present the views of the Republic of Palau before this special session of the General Assembly.

The island nation of Palau was not yet an independent country five years ago when the first international Earth Summit convened in Rio de Janeiro. Palau, therefore, was not a Member of the United Nations at that time. Palauans watched and listened as the assembled leaders discussed the protection of the environment, global climate change and sustainable development. We watched and listened carefully, aware that our nation was on the path to political independence. We understood that we would soon be joining the worldwide discussion about these urgent issues.

I speak today, representing the fully independent Republic of Palau, the newest State Member of the United Nations. Palau is an archipelago of extraordinary natural beauty. Anyone who spends a day among Palau's beautiful Rock Islands recognizes the importance of protecting our earth, air and water. We Palauans want to share our islands' astonishing beauty with visitors from around the world. To accomplish this, we must continue to develop. We must continue to strengthen our infrastructure to support our visitors. But we must continue to be very careful.

The Republic of Palau is striving for sustainable development that will not blight our land or pollute our air and water. In Palau, we recognize and realize that we must protect, not exploit, our natural resources.

The Republic of Palau is blessed by a clean environment. We have clean air that has blown across hundreds of kilometres of ocean. We have clean water that has not been polluted by the people or factories of a large metropolitan area. In many ways, we are very lucky that we live in one of the cleanest places on Earth. But the Republic of Palau cannot afford to be complacent. We face an immediate and critical problem in our islands from the impacts of global climate change.

Man is responsible for the changes in the Earth's climate. It is our automobiles, our jets, our factories and our air conditioners that emit pollutants such as carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere. We are dirtying our air. We are destroying the layer of ozone in our atmosphere that protects us from the ravages of excessive heat and light from the Sun.

Many scientists believe that average global air temperatures could rise as much as five degrees Celsius over the next century because of the pollutants emitted into our atmosphere. Increased air temperatures could prompt rapid melting in the polar ice caps that, in turn, could cause water levels to rise significantly in the world's oceans. Some predict a 1-metre rise in water levels within the next 100 years. When oceans rise, islands are in peril. This is as true for Palau as it is for Manhattan. Some islands will simply suffer more catastrophic damage. The rapid submersion of our island masses will cause untold grief for our nation. Homes will be destroyed. People will have to relocate. A way of life will be gone.

Palau stands in solidarity with its neighbour islands in the Pacific, which also face this peril. The ocean that surrounds us sustains us. But the ocean which sustains us also has the power to destroy us. We must do all that we can to turn back the tide. We must work in solidarity with the world community to address the issue of global climate change.

Rising sea levels will profoundly affect places as different as Madagascar and Amsterdam, Vanuatu and Venice.

I commend the efforts of those who attended the Earth Summit in Rio five years ago, and urge the Assembly to move forward quickly on Agenda 21. We must strive for environmental interdependence, recognizing the dangers that we pose to the Earth. We must devise and implement strategies for successful, sustainable development. And together we must preserve our natural environment.

Finally, we must continue to promote environmental education. Our children are our greatest natural resource. In Palau we try to teach our young people that they have the duty to preserve the natural beauty of our nation. They are the ones who will face the environmental challenges that will confront Palau in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the Delegation of Palau for his statement.

Mr. David Orrukem, Chairman of the Delegation of Palau, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, was escorted to the rostrum.

Archbishop Tauran (Holy See) (*interpretation from French*): Those who have spoken during these last days have proven the extent to which the concepts of an environment worthy of human beings and of sustainable development, both of which were elaborated at the Rio Summit in 1992, have become part of our way of thinking. The Holy See is pleased to note this, since the Catholic Church has always believed that the cause of the environment is the cause of the human person, who is at the same time both spiritual and material, the guardian and the consumer of natural resources and of what is produced by our intelligence and technical abilities.

To speak of forests, water resources, pollution of the air, water or soil, and human settlements, is to reflect upon living conditions and the survival of the whole of humankind. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development said nothing less when it specified that

> "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." (*A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), annex I, Principle 1*)

That is why I am pleased to find these aspects present in the draft final document which has been submitted for our consideration. However, my delegation cannot fail to repeat here the reservations and interpretations formulated by the Holy See at recent United Nations international conferences and which are — let us not forget — an integral part of the reports of those same conferences. I am thinking in particular of the interpretation given to terms such as "reproductive health", "sexual health" and "family planning", which we find once more in the draft document prepared at this session.

The results obtained at Rio — and even more, the commitments made there — make it our duty to protect nature in order to defend humanity. This must be done in a spirit of solidarity, without underestimating the link that exists between ecology, economics and equitable development.

A particular aspect of this problem, and one upon which I wish to insist, is the fate of the 50 million persons in the world who are displaced, in many cases as result of an inadequate environment offering no assurance of human or economic security. Let us not forget them: they have a right to life, to adequate shelter and to a stable food supply.

The Holy See believes that one of the simplest and most efficacious methods through which the insights and resolutions of Rio are becoming a reality is education. From earliest childhood and the beginnings of schooling, parents and teachers, through the atmosphere they create and by their instruction and witness, can teach young people to respect nature and to use its resources wisely. In this way they help them to develop attitudes of acceptance, sharing and giving.

In this very important task, believers are in the front line. They wish to help their fellow men and women go beyond mere respect for nature and a sharing of resources — which are, of course, absolutely necessary — in order to rediscover a sense of awe before the beauty of the natural elements, which can always inspire in us thoughts about the one who is always before us and whose very nature surpasses our own. The *Canticle of the Sun* of Francis of Assisi must surely be recalled here, or yet again the paradoxical expression of a contemporary author who did not hesitate to speak of "the spiritual power of matter".

In granting me the privilege of being with you, Pope John Paul II wishes to express the confidence he has in each of the world leaders represented here, so that, in his own words spoken in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on 22 October 1993, we may study these questions

> "with sure ethical convictions, mastery of self, justice and brotherly love".

That we might all follow the path of participation, discussion and perseverance is my dearest wish.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See for his statement.

Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Gayama (Organization of African Unity) (*interpretation from French*): For mankind joined together around the central theme of our common destiny, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 marked a crucial moment in history. The shockwave generated at Rio has reached us today as we meet at this special session of the General Assembly. It is as though we are hearing an echo of the "big bang" of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Let me convey to the General Assembly the greetings of the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim. I wish also to assure Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, of our unswerving cooperation in keeping with the spirit of the relations that link our two organizations.

I wish to recall the very important statement made earlier in this session on behalf of Africa by His Excellency Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and current Chairman of the OAU. His message has been an inspiration to us throughout this session.

What remains of the hopes generated five years ago at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development? The enthusiasm produced by the collapse of ideological barriers and the emergence to prominence of civil society, particularly of non-governmental organizations, gave rise to the concept of what we now call the global village, the point of which is to care for the interests of one and all under the banner of liberalism, which is the new ideology par excellence. Have we secured the conditions for the implementation of Agenda 21, or was that document in essence nothing more than a great, generous illusion? That is the central question.

For Africa, the answer to that question will be known only when we weigh the elements of the common African position formulated at Abidjan in November 1991 against the total of the action undertaken since Rio. The two possible approaches to this were either a comprehensive programme for Agenda 21 — the cost of which, as we all know, was estimated to be $600 billion a year — or the more traditional approach observing the laws of the market economy. But in such a critical area can we nowadays place our trust exclusively in market forces without even a minimum of political impetus?

The emphasis that the African common position placed on poverty reduction as one of its main strategic objectives was intended to let solidarity play its role as a driving force in a sustainable development that would combine environmental preservation with the rational use of the planet's limited resources. The idea was to generate, if not a real Marshall Plan for development, at least the partnership required by an increasingly interdependent world.

It was agreed at Rio that the developed countries were to bring the level of their official development assistance to the nominal level of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product and that sufficient resources were to be mobilized by each country and by the international community, including both the public and private sectors, for the survival of our planet Earth.

To appreciate the innovative nature of the outcome of the Rio Conference, it is important to look beyond speeches for the true nature and degree of commitment demonstrated by all parties in support of the commendable efforts being made by the Commission on Sustainable Development or such agencies as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) — headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya — which is sorely lacking in resources to manage the world's environment programme.

To strengthen UNEP as a specialized agency of the United Nations, with its various regional offices, would send a clear signal that the international community is committed to the management of the environment, thereby increasing acceptance for the idea of a common destiny and partnership, which was the basis for the conclusions of the Rio Conference.

Multilateral cooperation thus has a major role to play in the implementation of Agenda 21. We call for sustained and increased support for institutions such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development; the United Nations Development Programme; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which have invested a great deal of time and effort to win acceptance for the linkage between environment and development, which is essential if the debate on the environment is to have any credibility.

Since Rio, significant progress has been made in the legal area with the adoption of conventions that today form the framework of a new environmental order — the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and, most recently, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, which was adopted in 1994 and entered into force in December 1996.

Africa participated actively in the preparation and negotiations for the Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, as shown in that Convention's important annex on Africa.

The position of the African States on the Convention to Combat Desertification was made clear recently at the OAU's Harare meeting, at which the OAU Council of Ministers and its Assembly of Heads of State and Government emphasized the importance that Africa attaches to the first conference of the States parties and to the need to devise a regional programme of action for Africa.

The global mechanism of the Convention to Combat Desertification must be given real financial power. This will make it an operational tool that can be used in the field and also generate sufficient resources to support sustainable development projects. Thus endowed with financial resources, the mechanism will be able to play the catalytic role expected of it.

This question is of crucial importance to Africa because it can lay claim to the largest desert in the world and because the consequences of drought affect nearly all the continent. For this reason, a special resolution on emergency measures for Africa was submitted; it was adopted together with the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Despite the definite legal progress that has been made, public opinion in Africa, and certainly in other parts of the world, continues to question whether the measures taken over the past five years are commensurate with the magnitude of the stakes involved in environment and development. Needless to say, we cannot rely on the principle of "laissez-faire", or the global village will find it difficult to map out its battle strategy and develop its plan for the implementation of Agenda 21. While it is true that appropriate technologies to limit environmental degradation and reverse the trend can easily be identified, the fact remains that the connection between environmental degradation and egotistically driven consumption — which, though it serves as an impetus to economic growth, does not apportion properly the resulting benefits — remains to be made, notwithstanding all the fine words to the contrary.

Africa has two challenges to meet in this respect, the first being to exercise greater control over its environment. In that connection, the OAU acceded to the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, adopted in Algiers in 1968, and, in 1991, to the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes within Africa. We are as deeply committed to these two undertakings as we are to the provisions of Agenda 21.

Five years have elapsed since Rio, when the world unanimously decided to devise a responsible way of relating environment to development. This process involves not only a choice but also a new code of ethics. If there is to be a global village, it should not be based exclusively on all-powerful commerce. Short-term interests must be sacrificed so that together we can shape our future.

The main "raw materials" of the environment are air and water — priceless things. But what price will we have to pay later on to have available the most priceless commodity of all — life on earth?

Let us keep aflame, in all its brilliance and vigour, the torch that we lit in Rio five years ago.

The Acting President: I thank the Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity for his statement.

Mr. Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor to The Honourable Ieremia Tabai, Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat.

The Honourable Ieremia Tabai, Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Tabai (South Pacific Forum Secretariat): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a short statement on behalf of the members of the South Pacific Forum — comprising 16 independent States in the Pacific — most of whom are not here today.

Like people in other parts of the world, we aspire to better living standards and increased economic opportunities. High on the regional agenda is the need to achieve economic growth and development. But in recent years we have had to face many difficulties, including declining aid flows, erosion of trade preferences and disruptions of export production.

This has forced a fundamental rethinking of economic policy. Many countries of the region are now pursuing major economic reforms aimed at promoting investment and private sector development and making us better able to respond to global economic changes. Support for this process is high on the Forum agenda.

But while we seek economic growth and the development of our narrow resource base, we do so with a firm understanding of and commitment to the principles of sustainable development. We know that sustainable development in the region can be possible only if economic development takes environmental considerations into account. Coming from very small island countries, most of which have the most fragile ecosystems in the world, with some rising only a few feet above sea level, we are keenly aware of the need to give due consideration to the environmental implications of economic policy decisions.

The major environmental issues for the Pacific island countries remain largely unchanged. They have been discussed before in other United Nations-sponsored meetings, but they need to be reemphasized again in the context of this debate reviewing Agenda 21 in order to encourage the international community to continue addressing them in a serious way. These concerns cover many vital issues, not only for ourselves, but also for all nations: the threat of climate change and sea-level rise; pollution from solid wastes and sewerage; the loss of biodiversity; deforestation; and the degradation of the marine environment, including reef resources, to name but a few.

While we do not deny that the first step and the onus of development lie squarely on our own shoulders, there are crucial elements of development that cannot be addressed at the national and subregional levels alone, but require action at the global level as well.

Many of the problems we face have been imported into our region and we have little or no control over them. Global warming, for instance, and the expected rise in sea levels are very real threats to many atoll island States, and if these threats are not quickly and adequately addressed, whole countries, cultures and peoples will simply cease to exist. It is therefore imperative to continue addressing them, recognizing that individual state actions alone will have little impact on this global problem. We must all have a strong commitment to formulating acceptable policies to achieve significant progress towards the goal of lower greenhouse-gas emissions.

Fresh water and the disposal of wastes are also issues of particular concern to our people. Fresh water is a renewable but limited resource and it is generally recognized that there is a global decline in the quality and quantity of fresh-water supplies. Access to fresh water in the Pacific region is often limited and uncertain on both high islands and atolls. The lack of water-resource data for our region further hampers planning and holds back the development of agriculture and tourism.

Inadequate facilities for sanitation and the disposal of other wastes provide additional sources of contamination and pollution, particularly of the marine environment. Most of the Pacific island States have inadequate facilities for dealing with domestic effluence, ship-borne wastes, pesticide disposal and the recycling of items, such as used batteries.

All these serve to emphasize the priorities of fresh water and adequate waste disposal in our consideration of sustainable development and of expanding international support for national and regional attempts to address these issues. Further encouragement should be given by the international community to the integration of regional fresh-water and waste-management programmes and the provision of technical and scientific data to assist in planning and development.

Small island developing States, not only in the Pacific but elsewhere, face other kinds of problems. These come not only from economic and environmental pressures, but also from the world's perception of events in the region. The transportation of nuclear wastes through our region poses a continuing concern. Even if there were low risks of contamination from an accident occurring in our waters, they would nevertheless have an enormous impact on public perception. It is that perception which underlies our economic vulnerability. Just as, in the United Kingdom, the beef industry suffered from the perception of the dangers of mad cow disease, we too would find that no one would eat our fish out of fear of contamination, which would destroy our major resource.

While we recognize that some progress has been achieved in implementing Agenda 21 and the commitments made in Rio, there is no denying that many issues, such as the ones I have outlined, are yet to be adequately addressed. For us in the South Pacific, sustainable development remains a particular concern. As referred to earlier, many island countries and territories have fragile environments and small land areas, and rely on their natural resources or ability to attract tourists for a significant part of their national income. This makes it imperative that economic development and environmental policies be mutually integrated and supportive, not only for the sake of our region, but for the rest of the world.

I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the Rio agreements and principles and to seeking practical expressions of partnership with others to achieve these objectives. We are optimistic that, with national and international action and mutual support, we can achieve our aim of advancing the present without compromising the future.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat for his statement.

The Honourable Ieremia Tabai, Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Collin Marake Matjila, of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities, speaking on behalf of the Local Authorities' Major Group.

Mr. Collin Marake Matjila, of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Matjila (International Union of Local Authorities): It is a great honour to be addressing the Assembly today on behalf of the world community of local government and, in particular, on behalf of the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC) and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).

The relationship between local government and the United Nations community has come a long way since the Earth Summit in 1992. Members will recall that, on the occasion of that historic event, the debate about our common future was often polarized into the choice between rural sustainability and urban migration, between the green agenda and the brown agenda, between developed and developing economies. In these debates, the roles and concerns of local government were not recognized.

Indeed, while we applaud the recognition granted to local government in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, the two pages in that Chapter hardly reflect the immense financial, infrastructure, administrative and governmental contribution of local Governments to the green and brown agendas or to the agendas of the North and South. In key areas such as waste and water, where Governments and the private sector rely heavily on local government for their day-to-day viability, little attention was paid to local government. Despite this, we joined forces and adopted Agenda 21 as our agenda for action.

Since 1992 more than 2,000 local governments in over 64 countries have begun to work with their communities to implement every aspect of Agenda 21. We in local government are proud to have led one of the indisputably significant follow-up efforts to the Rio Summit.

Through the participatory planning process of local Agenda 21 programmes, hundreds of local governments have reorganized their operations to better advance sustainable development. We have worked to involve all sectors of our communities as partners, including women and youth.

Greater Johannesburg has been very successful in aligning its local Agenda 21 with its development processes, which has in turn been institutionalized within the legal framework, and it has organized sustainable urban environmental management by integrating it into the overall functioning of local government.

Local governments have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in waste management, waste-water treatment, public transport, clean fuels and energy efficiency, public health, settlement upgrading, housing and habitat protection and many other areas. One example is the action being taken by close to 1,000 local governments to implement the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Protecting the global climate was not seen as a traditional local responsibility. Nonetheless, local governments have been the first to set and achieve concrete targets for greenhouse-gas emission reductions.

In 1988 the city government of Toronto, Canada, became the first to adopt a carbon-dioxide reduction target of 20 per cent by 2010. A 1996 assessment of Toronto's emissions revealed a three per cent reduction from 1988 levels. Our lesson is clear: governments can set targets, and targets can be achieved.

All of these local actions have engendered a greater recognition in the international community of the role of local government. We believe that this recognition will make future efforts all the more concrete and successful.

National Governments and local governments shared the path to the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (Habitat II). On that occasion, local governments were invited for the first time in the history of the United Nations to participate actively in the deliberations of a major United Nations conference. Today we urge the Member States and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to build upon that precedent.

Local governments, with their democratic legitimacy and public responsibilities, are distinct from the non-governmental-organization sector. The worldwide community of local government, through its representative structure, the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities, is ready to build a more effective partnership with the United Nations on the basis of this reality. Let us go forward as we enter the new millennium.

Since 1992 numerous countries have chosen to prepare themselves for the new century by enhancing the status and capacity of local government. More than 70 countries are now engaged in a formal process of decentralization. This is a global trend that reflects the global reality of cooperative governance. In this context, I would like to note the recognition and status accorded to local government in the South African Constitution. This recognition and status are viewed by many international experts as a model for the world.

Our experience indicates that for continued success the following three elements are important: first, United Nations recognition and support for local government as a full Agenda 21 partner; secondly, responsible national decentralization, cooperation and partnership with local government to implement Agenda 21; and, thirdly, sustained local government action in partnership with women, youth and other sectors of local communities.

Therefore, on the occasion of this five-year review of Agenda 21, I would like to close by highlighting some key issues of concern to the functioning of this partnership.

First, we urge the United Nations to find ways to institutionalize the recognition and involvement of local government in its deliberations.

Secondly, we urge the international community to ensure that local Agenda 21 programmes and similar sustainable-development efforts are protected under international trade agreements. We would welcome international investors to support the implementation of our local Agenda 21 programmes.

Thirdly, we support the proposals made by numerous Governments at this week's meetings to review subsidies and to identify economic instruments that could contribute to sustainable development. We pledge to participate in such a review.

Local government recently completed its own five-year review of Agenda 21 at the Pathways to Sustainability conference held in Newcastle, Australia. The resulting Newcastle Declaration indicates that although the promise of Rio has not been realized, some progress has been made.

I believe that, with the further assistance and cooperation of the United Nations and the international community, by the year 2002 our successes will be more visible in the daily lives of people. Our dream for a better life for all people, wherever they live, can be realized.

The Acting President: I thank the representative of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities for his statement.

Mr. Collin Marake Matjila of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is Ms. Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council, speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group.

Ms. Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Carmen (International Indian Treaty Council): On behalf of the International Indian Treaty Council and indigenous peoples, I offer my heart and hand in respectful greeting to all gathered here today at this special session of the General Assembly, the Earth Summit + 5.

In 1992 the Governments and the peoples of the world reached the historic agreement known as Agenda 21, recognizing that the protection and sustainability of the rapidly diminishing diversity of life on Earth required an immediate, unified, international response.

Indigenous peoples have always been at the forefront of this struggle to protect the sacred, interconnected web of life that we are now calling biological diversity. We uphold the traditional indigenous perspective that the mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being of our peoples and the survival of our future generations cannot be separated from the health of our environment, the practice of our cultures and religions and the expression of our inherent right to self-determination.

A critical component of both Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity is the commitment by the States parties to work in full partnership with indigenous peoples regarding any development involving our natural resources and cultural knowledge, while recognizing our unique expertise and relationship to the Earth through the sustainable-development practices we have utilized since time immemorial. That this promised partnership has not become a reality does not diminish the importance of the commitment or of the unmet challenges it presents to State Governments.

Unabated non-sustainable resource extraction and contamination having an impact on indigenous peoples have accelerated over the five years since the Rio Earth Summit. In the vast majority of cases, the affected peoples have not been consulted, and much less have they given their agreement, despite Agenda 21's promise. Examples include the dumping of toxic and radioactive wastes on land and in oceans, the discharge of persistent organic pollutants into the food chain, rampant deforestation, expanding militarism and weapons testing, hydroelectric dam projects, the commercial overharvesting of fish, open-pit mining and oil drilling.

We thank the President of the General Assembly for his statement to the high-level segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in April in which he recognized that mining can never be sustainable and remains one of the most unsustainable practices that threatens communities and the environment.

The profound devastation caused by mining and drilling is far too pervasive to catalogue. A few of the innumerable examples include the Pegasus cyanide heap-leach gold mine in Montana, which is adjacent to Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribal territories, the massive Black Mesa coal mine on lands sacred to the Dineh and Hopi peoples in Big Mountain, Arizona, the extreme levels of contamination caused by Shell Oil on Ogoni traditional lands in Nigeria, and the gold-mining and uranium-drilling in the sacred Black Hills in violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty between the Lakota Nation and the United States.

Yet the devastating effects of mining and oil drilling were not addressed in Agenda 21. The Commission on Sustainable Development should immediately move to rectify this omission, in full partnership with indigenous peoples.

The 1990 United Nations Global Consultation on the Realization of the Right to Development as a Human Right underlined that the most destructive and prevalent abuses of indigenous rights are the direct consequences of development strategies that fail to respect the fundamental right of self-determination. The provisions of Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity will never result in economic or political gains that are sustainable over time if they fail to recognize the fundamental rights of development and self-determination, as well as the full territorial and cultural rights of indigenous peoples.

Pending this recognition, the Convention on Biological Diversity's reference in article 8 (j) to the sharing of benefits resulting from the development of plant resources and the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples is inevitably an open invitation to commercial exploitation and appropriation.

Agenda 21 emphasized that:

> "Indigenous people and their communities shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination." *(A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol.1), chap. 26, para. 26.1)*

We therefore urge the Earth Summit + 5 to underscore this commitment by calling for the adoption of the present text of the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as adopted by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities as an essential component for the full implementation of Agenda 21.

Indigenous peoples have called for an international moratorium on the patenting of life forms and expressed vehement opposition to making life a commodity through what is called "biological prospecting", including the marketing by pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies of animal and human genetic and cell materials and of plants used for food, medicinal and religious purposes by indigenous peoples since time immemorial, such as quinoa.

Western intellectual property-rights systems and international trade agreements being codified globally through the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Trade Organization's trade-related intellectual property rights, as well as regional trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, defy basic principles that emerged from the first Earth Summit and contain no provisions for safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples see a grave danger in putting the world's food supplies in the hands of companies intent on producing profitable new bio-engineered strains while unsustainable practices are reducing the variety of plant and animal species found in their natural habitats.

Indigenous peoples have consistently expressed opposition to the Human Genome Diversity Project and the harvesting and patenting without consent of our ancestral genetic heritage by multinational corporations as well as governmental institutions. The use and exploitation of human genetic materials and human cell lines are not directly addressed in the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is seen by indigenous peoples as another grave omission that limits its potential to monitor and oversee the total range of "bioprospecting" activities having an impact on indigenous peoples.

Another critical weakness of Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity is the lack of effective mechanisms to oversee and control the impacts of globalization, including the activities of multinational corporations, international financial institutions, multinational military operations, the multilateral investment agreement and international trade-agreement bodies. The indigenous Caucus at the recent fifth session of the CSD called for comprehensive impact reports on the actions of Governments and multinational corporations and their effects on indigenous peoples with regard to issues of non-sustainable resource extraction and biological prospecting, a proposal which the General Assembly should underscore and the CSD immediately implement.

We also call upon the General Assembly to support the adoption without delay of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples within the United Nations system, which could serve as a forum for overseeing and investigating these types of abuses and play an effective role in preventing deadly conflicts arising from the opposition of indigenous peoples to impose development within their territories. The fully informed and effective participation of indigenous peoples in all aspects of the discussions, decisions and forums originating from the Rio Earth Summit must be ensured if the promise of partnership is ever to become a reality. Therefore, the international Indian Treaty Council and indigenous peoples propose that a working group of indigenous peoples be formally instituted at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1998.

Our organization also commends the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity for hiring an indigenous person, as recommended at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be active in the dissemination of information and inclusion of greater numbers of indigenous peoples in this process.

The monumental responsibility this Assembly holds in its hands requires the recognition that human beings are not only actors upon and developers of the natural world, but are an integral part of the Earth's biological diversity. The natural world is not a commodity. The natural world, the Earth, is our mother, providing all that we eat, drink, breathe and use in our daily lives. The diverse forms of life on this Earth depend upon us to protect their survival, not as potential products to be exploited but as living things with an intrinsic value and a place in the sacred web of life that cannot be jeopardized without risk to our own place, our own human existence. Please think about the lives of your own grandchildren as you consider the choices before you today.

My prayers are with this Assembly and all my relations.

The Acting President: I thank the Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council for her statement.

Ms. Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council, was escorted from the rostrum.

Programme of work

The Acting President: Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to inform members that it will be necessary to hold one further plenary meeting of the General Assembly after the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Nineteenth Special Session has completed its work and the relevant documents are available to the Assembly.

May I therefore take it that the Assembly authorizes the President to convene one more plenary meeting on the understanding that it will take place upon completion of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The next plenary meeting will take place at 9 p.m. tonight, provided that the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole has completed its work.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.